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MEDITATIONS

FOR THE USE OF

SEMINARIANS AND PRIESTS





MEDITATIONS

FOR THE USE OF

SEMINARIANS AND PRIESTS

BY

Very Rev. L. BRANCHEREAU, S. S.

Translated and adapted

VOLUME IV

LITURGICAL YEAR

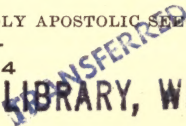
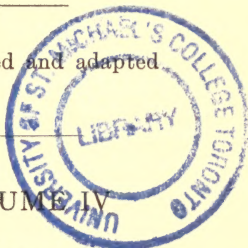
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MORNING PRAYERS

Benedicta sit sancta et individua Trinitas, nunc et semper, et per infinita sæcula sæculorum. Amen.

I adore thee, most august Majesty, one God, in three persons; I adore thy divine perfections incomprehensible to men and angels. Being nothing of myself and unable to honor thee as thou deservest to be honored, I offer thee all the homage and praise which thy Incarnate Word offers for me in heaven and upon earth, and with my whole heart, I unite in all that his Holy Spirit operates for thy glory in his members. Most holy and most adorable Trinity, suffer me, through Jesus Christ, our mediator with thee, and by the grace of his Holy Spirit, to offer thee my feeble tribute of homage.

ACT OF ADORATION.

Eternal Father, I adore thee as my Creator; I revere that boundless love and goodness which induced thy supreme Majesty to look down upon a less than nothing, and to bring me into existence. Eternal Word, I adore thee as my Redeemer who, equal to thy Father, didst, in the womb of thy mother, make thyself like unto us, taking upon thyself the form of a servant, living in poverty and dying in ignominy, to rise again in glory like unto that of thy Father, in order to teach us to live penitently, and to resign ourselves submis-

sively to our sentence of death, with the full assurance of being made, by the resurrection, partakers of the glory of the children of God. Divine Spirit, I adore thee, the sanctifier of my soul, who dost consume sin in my heart by the fire of thy holy love, and dost descend continually into this abyss of iniquity, my heart, in order that by breathing into it that life-giving holiness which thou dost draw from the bosom of the Father and the Son, thou mayest make me worthy of being associated with them in their glory.

ACT OF THANKSGIVING.

Eternal Father, I thank thee for having with such great love created me; having with so much patience borne with me in spite of my transgressions, and especially for having preserved me during the past night and given me this day in which to serve and honor thee. Son of God, I thank thee for having by the labors of thy life and the sufferings of thy death preserved me a thousand times from hell, and merited for me all the blessings which are found in thy Church. Divine Spirit, I thank thee for having deigned to infuse so many gifts and graces into my soul and for having so often begotten me anew by thy sanctifying grace, notwithstanding all the contempt I have shown for thy blessings.

ACT OF CONTRITION.

Pardon, I beseech thee, Eternal Father, the wretched use I have made of the body and the soul

which thou hast given me with so much goodness, and hast preserved with so much mercy. I beg forgiveness, O Son of God, for having profited so little by the holy example of thy life, by the counsels of thy holy Gospel, and by the graces of all thy holy Sacraments. Divine Spirit, forgive me the contempt which I have shown for thy inspirations, for thy lights and for that lively repentance which it hath pleased thee to excite in my soul.

ACT OF OBLATION.

Eternal Father, I offer thee all the actions of this day, and I renounce all the self-satisfaction I might feel in them. Eternal Word, I offer thee all my thoughts and words, and beforehand I condemn all that are vain and useless. Spirit of God, I consecrate to thee all the affections of my heart, and I renounce all the irregular desires of nature.

ACT OF RESIGNATION.

Eternal Father, I renounce all confidence in my own strength and give myself entirely to thee, that thou mayest be my strength and support. Son of God, I condemn all the presumption of my own mind and give myself up entirely to thee, to be governed by thy wisdom alone. Divine Spirit, I sacrifice to thee all my natural inclinations, in order to follow the desires of sanctity which thou implantest in pious souls. Eternal Father, do thou perfect my soul; Son of God, do thou enlighten it; Holy Spirit, do thou direct it.

Pater Noster. Ave Maria. Credo.

I offer thee once more, O my God, my thoughts, my words, and my actions, in union with those of Jesus Christ, that they may be worthy of being received by thee; and I renounce every intention, but that which he would have, were he upon earth and in my place. I unite, O my God, with his Divine Spirit, who causes thee to be loved and adored by all the angels and saints, and who fills heaven and earth with holy praises of thee, that aided by that Holy Spirit I may join with all those creatures who honor thee, and especially with those who honor thee by mental prayer.¹

¹ From the *Journée Chrétienne* of Father Olier.

Some may prefer the following shorter form of morning prayers.

Benedicta sit sancta et individua Trinitas, nunc et semper et per infinita sæcula sæculorum. Amen.

O Almighty and Eternal God: in union with all thy elect in heaven and on earth, I adore thee, I love thee, I praise and thank thee for all the gifts of nature and grace, which I have received from thy infinite goodness. I thank thee principally for having created me to thy image and likeness, and preserved me to this day: for having given thy only begotten Son to suffer death for me on the cross, and to wash away my sins with his most precious blood. I thank thee for having called me to the faith of the Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church; for having so often pardoned me my sins, for having watched over me during this past night, and preserved me from a sudden death and from all the other evils which might have befallen me, had I not been protected by thy merciful and watchful Providence.

Would that I could make thee, O Lord, in return for all thy mercies, an offering of gratitude and love proportionate to their number and greatness. Of myself indeed I am nothing, have nothing, and can do nothing worthy of thee. But since, by a wonderful device of thy wisdom and love, I have access to thy majesty through Christ my Savior, I humbly offer thee, in union with him and through his Sacred Heart, whatever I possess, my body, my senses, all the powers of my soul. I firmly purpose by thy divine grace not to think, say or do anything unworthy of one called to the priesthood.

Help me, O Lord, to curb my evil inclinations, and so guide and sustain me in all things that every thought, word and action of mine may tend to thy greater glory, the sanctification of my soul and the good of those around me.

Pater Noster. Ave Maria. Credo.

Domine Deus Omnipotens, qui ad principium hujus diei nos pervenire fecisti, tua nos hodie salva virtute, ut in hac die ad nullum declinemus peccatum, sed semper ad tuam justitiam faciendam nostra procedant eloquia, dirigantur cogitationes et opera. Per Christum Dominum nostrum. Amen.

Angele Dei, qui custos es mei, me tibi commissum pietate superna illumina, custodi, rege, et gubernare. Amen.

Dominus nos benedicat et ab omni malo defendat et ad vitam perducatur æternam; et fidelium animæ per misericordiam Dei requiescant in pace. Amen.

PREPARATION FOR MEDITATION

Before beginning meditation, there are always three things to be done:

1. *To place ourselves in the presence of God by two acts, one of faith, the other of adoration.*

My God, I firmly believe, on the authority of thy word, that thou art here present, and in the inmost recesses of my heart, as truly as that thou art in heaven, in the midst of saints and angels. O Sovereign Majesty, my God, before whom the whole universe is but as dust, I prostrate myself before thee, acknowledging that thou art my Creator and that I am thy creature and thus I offer the homage of my whole being to thy supreme Majesty.

2. *To acknowledge ourselves unworthy of appearing before God, and thus to excite ourselves to contrition.*

I confess, O my God, that I am unworthy to appear in thy presence. I acknowledge that I do not deserve that thou shouldst look upon me, on account of my nothingness, my vileness and my numberless sins. Yea, Lord, I am filled with confusion at the sight of my own misery caused by my own sins; but I do heartily repent having offended thee. I am sorry, because thou art infinitely good, and because sin is so displeasing to thee. Prostrate at thy feet, I implore thy grace that I may be converted, and may do penance before thee.

Confiteor, etc.

3. *To unite ourselves to Jesus Christ in order to appear before his Father in his name; and implore the aid of the Holy Ghost for our meditation.*

Not in my own name, O my God, have I the blindness to address my prayer to thee; it is in the name of thy well-beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ; all my confidence is in him. Clothed in his merits I present myself before thee, to implore thy grace, like Jacob of old clad in the garments of his elder brother, presenting himself before his father to ask his blessing. I know that of myself I can have neither a good thought nor even a desire that shall conduce to my salvation. Have mercy on me, O God! I humbly confess my nothingness and my wretchedness; I renounce my own thoughts and my earthly affections, and give myself up entirely to thy divine Spirit. Come then, O Holy Ghost! enlighten my darkness; inflame my lukewarmness; strengthen my weakness. I desire to make this meditation by thy lights, by thy impulse, and under thy guidance.

Holy Virgin, mother of divine wisdom and purest love help me, I beseech Thee, to obtain this grace.

After Meditation.

O Jesu vivens in Maria, veni, et vive in famulis tuis, in spiritu sanctitatis tuæ, in plenitudine virtutis tuæ, in perfectione viarum tuarum, in veritate virtutum tuarum, in communione mysteriorum tuorum; dominare omni adversæ potestati in Spiritu tuo ad gloriam Patris. Amen.

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LITURGICAL YEAR

I

THE COMING OF GOD

SUMMARY

I. We will adore God longed for by the patriarchs and prophets, the only source of every best gift. In union with the Church we will implore the divine help. We will live in a constant expectation of the divine guest.

II. We will distinguish three comings of God into the world.

1. *The coming of God the Creator.* From eternity empty void had been awaiting the all-powerful word that would create the world. But we have continual need of God's creative power to preserve and renew his creative act. Hence we should recall our absolute dependence on God.

2. *The coming of God the Redeemer.* For thousands of years he was expected. He came and the Church wishes us to draw him to our hearts. But all have not yet received him.

3. *The coming of God the Rewarder and Punisher.* At the end of time our Lord will come in the glory of his majesty to reward the good and punish the wicked. In view of this coming we ought to rejoice, accept the trials of this life, and arouse our watchfulness.

III. We will renew our longing for God's coming.

We will ask ourselves whether we appreciate our need of it. Like the people of Israel, we have deserved God's reproaches for our unfaithfulness and ingratitude.

We will resolve:

1. During this Advent to entertain a deeper sense of complete dependence upon God;

2. To long for the coming of the Savior into our hearts.

Veni, Domine Jesu.

ADORATION

There is no time of the year that can be a truer expression of the life of the Church and of the just on earth than that of Advent. For, the *Adventus Domini* is intended to commemorate the coming of God into the world. Now, the Church lives in the expectation of this coming. She longs for it with all possible earnestness, calling for God to come, beseeching him both in the language of the patriarchs and prophets and in the prayer by which Saint John concludes his Apocalypse, which contains the substance of all the invocations of the Church, *Veni, Domine Jesu*.¹

¹ APOC., 22³⁰

At the beginning of our meditation, let us adore God, the only source of light, of holiness, of life, of every good. From him, as St. James says, flows every perfect gift. *Every best gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights;*¹ and it is to him that we owe all we possess in the natural order as well as in the order of grace.

Convinced of this truth and feeling profoundly our need of help from above, without which we can do nothing, let us join with holy Church in ceaselessly asking God to come and save us, beseeching the Lord our God in the words of the prophet: *O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and wouldst come down.*² Living during these four weeks in a constant spirit of desire and expectation, let us prepare our hearts to receive the divine guest whose coming is announced to us and who, by his presence, should fill us with grace, light, and love. *Be prepared to meet thy God, O Israel.*³

CONSIDERATIONS

We can distinguish three comings of God into the world, which ought to be the object

¹ JAMES, 1¹⁷

² IS., 64¹

³ AMOS, 4¹²

of our expectation and to which the Church alludes in the office of this season: the coming of God the Creator, of God the Redeemer, of God the Rewarder and Punisher.

1. *The coming of God the Creator.* God first manifested himself in the world as Creator, and it is under this title that the Church invokes him in the Advent hymn, *Creator alme siderum*. Before the creation he had lived only in himself without manifesting and expressing his divine perfections outside of himself. The world with all the wonders that it contains had not yet begun to be; from eternity empty void had been awaiting the all-powerful word that would create the world and make the countless multitude of beings spring forth from it.

But this expectation of the Creator's coming has not ceased with creation. Have we not continual need of God's creative powers? Do we not need it to sustain and preserve our life, our very being? Should not the eyes of God's creatures be turned towards him who bestows upon them the life which he possesses? *The eyes of all hope in thee, O Lord. . . . Thou openest thy hand and fillest with blessings every living creature.*¹

¹ Ps., 144¹⁵

At every moment God renews his coming into the world as Creator, and each year he gives us a visible manifestation of it in the fruits and harvests by which our life is sustained. In the country the husbandman places the seed in the ground and we wait for it to develop and fructify. So do we await the coming of God the Creator to make our labor fruitful. *Thou shalt send forth thy spirit and they shall be created; thou shalt renew the face of the earth.*¹

Hence arises a duty of Christian piety that seldom occurs to us. In our continual and universal need of God, we ought confidently to ask: *Give us this day our daily bread.*² And we should regard ourselves as depending upon him for all the necessities of life, our food and clothing, in short for all that our body requires.

2. *The coming of God the Redeemer.* For thousands of years the world lived in the hope of a new divine advent, the expectation of the Redeemer. The work of the creation, indeed, so pure and beautiful, when it came from the hand of its Maker, was soon marred and degraded by sin. That it might become worthy of the end for which it had been created, a restoration was necessary: this was

¹ PS., 103³⁰ ² LUKE, 11³

the work of the Redeemer. Promised by God to the first man after his disobedience, he became the object of a world-wide expectation which verily sums up the life and history of ancient times.

Today he who was the object of that hope has come. The Messiah has descended to earth. We have seen his glory and we share in the fruit of his Redemption. However, the Church wishes us during Advent to live in the spirit of messianic expectation. For the work of the Redeemer, like that of the creation, continues day after day. Jesus gave himself to the world, he sanctified and redeemed it, he communicated life to it and established the society of his saints. But we, by a faithful coöperation with the grace that he merited for us, should all participate in the fruit of his coming. Alas! are not all the evils which the Messiah came to cure still found in our midst to some degree or other? Are there not darkness in our intellect and weakness in our will? And then, how many have not yet profited by this grace, have not been enlightened by the good tidings of Redemption but remain still in infidelity? How many others, knowing Christ indeed but

blinded by prejudice and their passions, refuse him the homage of their faith, love, and obedience.

And so, even in our day, there is need of calling upon the Savior to come that he may complete his work, lead the strayed sheep back to himself, strengthen weak and hesitating wills by the power of his grace, and purify unclean hearts by his holiness. It is the prayer that we ought at all times to address to the incarnate Word, the source of all supernatural life. But in the holy season of Advent it should arise from our hearts more frequently and fervently than at other times. The Church exhorts us to do so and sets the example in the office of Advent in which she entreats the divine Messias to come on earth to establish his kingdom among us.

3. *The coming of God the Rewarder and Punisher.* This advent of God is called to our mind especially by the gospel of the first Sunday of Advent. The incarnate Son of God, having returned to heaven, after accomplishing the work of our redemption, will return to earth at the end of time. He will come, not in the humility of the crib but in the splendor of his divine majesty. All generations of

mankind, gathered together before the tribunal of this sovereign Judge, will hear from his lips the decree that will determine their lot for all eternity.

The Church lives in the expectation of this last coming which will be the consummation and crowning of the other two. And it is the certain hope of it that consoles her in the midst of her trials and sustains her in all her struggles. The saints of heaven, already in possession of their reward, await it also; because only then will their glory be complete when they will see God's justice proclaimed and made manifest. *And they cried with a loud voice, saying: How long, O Lord (holy and true) dost thou not judge and revenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?*¹

The expectation of Christ's coming as the rewarder and punisher should produce in us three dispositions.

In the first place, joy at the thought of the glory that will accompany the triumph of Christ and his saints. That glory is now incomplete, or rather it is obscured and veiled by the violence and persecution of the wicked.

¹ APOC., 6¹⁰

But then Jesus Christ and his saints will triumph and their enemies will be confounded.

The second disposition is a readiness to accept the trials of this life. It is what Holy Writ calls the patience of the saints. Let us not be disturbed by scandals and disorders which this world presents. We should be surprised neither by persecutions which the good undergo nor by the worldly triumphs accorded to the wicked. If God permits his friends to receive insults, contempt, and injustice, we know that he does not abandon them; but he permits them to find in these tribulations the means of meriting a far richer reward.

Finally, the consideration of the last coming of Christ should arouse our watchfulness. For the Gospel teaches us that it will take place unexpectedly. It will surprise mankind as in the time of Noe the deluge surprised those who dwelt on the earth. *For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, even till that day in which Noe entered into the ark, and they knew not till the flood came and took them all away; so also shall the coming of the son of man be.*¹ Following our Lord's

¹ MATT., 24^{38, 39}

warning, let us be like the faithful servant who watched so as to be ready when his master should come.

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Conformably to the desire of the Church, I should renew in myself the longing for God's coming, and realize more and more the need of his help. This is the disposition of soul that was expressed by the royal prophet when he said: *I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains, from whence help shall come to me. My help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.*¹

Have I entered into the spirit of this expectation? Do I entertain a deep sense of my need of God in the natural order as well as in the order of grace? Am I really convinced of this fundamental truth that without God I am nothing, and can do nothing? And is it in God alone that I place my trust? Do I long for him and have I recourse to him in my needs?

My God, thou didst again and again reproach thy people by the mouth of the prophets for

¹ Ps., 120¹, 2

their unfaithfulness and ingratitude when they placed in vain idols or in human support the reliance that should have been placed in thee alone. Have I not justly merited the same reproach? By thy grace, grant that it may be so no more. Inspire in me a deep-seated desire to establish thy kingdom in my soul. After the example of the saints, from the depths of my unworthiness I cry to thee, I implore thee as my only refuge, to obtain thy assistance and the support of thy help.

I resolve:

1. During this Advent to entertain a deeper sense of complete dependence upon God;

2. Earnestly to long for the coming of the Savior into my heart.

*Veni, Domine Jesu.*¹

¹ APOC., 22²⁰

II

THE PEOPLE OF GOD

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore God preparing the world for the coming of the Messias by the choice of one nation. As seminarians we are in the Church what the people of God was in the world. We will thank God that we, like Israel, are his chosen people.
- II. We will consider that we have all the prerogatives of the people of Israel.
 1. As they were led from Egypt, so we have been brought from the slavery of the world and our passions.
 2. Like them, we have received from God a holy law.
 3. In a more perfect manner than God was in the midst of the Israelites, he is with us by his real presence and by a special providence.
 4. In the seminary we taste the sweetness of the promised land. Here there is neither preoccupation nor anxiety but perfect peace.
 5. Like Israel we have guides and advisers who interpret the law for us, the representatives of God's solicitude and watchfulness.
- III. We will humble ourselves for not having sufficiently thanked God for the graces attached to seminary life. We will ask ourselves whether

we are culpable imitators of the Israelites who found the manna insipid and bitter.

We will resolve:

1. To love the seminary, the rule, and all the means of sanctification that are offered to us;

2. To be more zealous in showing ourselves faithful in all things;

3. Frequently to thank God for having called us here.

*The Lord ruleth me: and I shall want nothing.
He hath set me in a place of pasture.*

ADORATION

Let us adore God preparing the world from the beginning of time for the coming of the Messias. While all the nations of the earth strayed away, lost in the darkness of gross idolatry in which there perished not only the knowledge of the true religion but also the rule of morals and the science of salvation, God chose a people, the object of his constant solicitude, that he separated from other peoples, surrounded with tender affection, in the midst of which he sought to preserve the holy traditions that were elsewhere altered and obscured—the people of God. From them was to arise the promised Messias, and their history was a preparation for the coming of the Redeemer.

This privileged people is an image of the young students, hidden in the seclusion of the seminary, preparing for the priesthood. We are in the Church what Israel was in the world—the people of God. Like Israel we are recipients of the divine promises, we are preparing to receive the prerogative of giving to the world the Son of God made flesh. Our life in the seminary is, in God's designs, a preparation for the coming of Christ into the souls of men as the history of the Jewish people was a preparation for the coming of Christ on earth. Thus, what God did for that people in the temporal order, he does for us in the spiritual order.

Moved by gratitude, the people of Israel were wont to sing canticles of thanksgiving to praise and bless the God of their fathers, and to celebrate his mercies. *Praise the Lord because he is good, says the psalmist, because his mercy endureth for ever.*¹

Likewise let us raise our hearts to God in thanksgiving. We are *a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood.*² Let us thank our Lord for this glorious preferment which we have not

¹ Ps., *passim*

² I PETER. 2⁹

merited but which is due to the gratuitous mercy of him who has chosen us and called us to his holy priesthood. *Misericordias Domini in aeternum cantabo.*¹

CONSIDERATIONS

Let us consider how that special protection which God accorded to his chosen people is repeated towards us here in the seminary.

1. *God drew Israel from Egyptian bondage.* To accomplish this act of his mercy, God multiplied his prodigies, afflicted Egypt with direful plagues, and miraculously opened a path for his beloved people through the waters of the Red Sea.

For us too there has been a setting out from Egypt. That Egypt, which is to say the world, where so many snares cross one's path, where perhaps we would have been lost like so many others if God had left us there. Ties and seductions there were to keep us back. And it was not, perhaps, without a violent struggle that these bonds were broken and these seductions repelled. But God, wishing us for himself, overthrew all obstacles and delivered us from captivity.

¹ Ps., 88²

After this first deliverance there was another, still more important, rescue from our own passions which held us under their yoke and which, by God's grace, we have conquered. We are free now from all that bondage.

2. *God gave Israel his law.* This was the divine seal of the covenant that he had made with them, the solemn covenant by which the children of Jacob became God's people. It was a holy law, and in its faithful observance Israel was to find the assurance of divine protection.

We enjoy a like prerogative. The rule under which we live, which determines the order of our exercises and the use of our time, is, in a certain sense, the law of God. Like that of Israel, it is a holy law the keeping of which will procure great advantages for us, assure us of God's protection, his grace, and numberless merits. By observing it we attain to a lofty perfection, we will acquire the virtues that our vocation requires, we will accomplish in an excellent manner God's design in our regard.

3. *God was present in the midst of his people.* As a visible sign of his divine presence, he had the Israelites erect in the midst of their camp

a tabernacle where he dwelt and where, from the ark of the covenant, he delivered his oracles. Israel found therein a source of great confidence, knowing that God was with them to direct, protect, and defend them against their enemies. In joy and thanksgiving they said: *Neither is there any other nation so great, that hath gods so nigh them, as our God is present to all our petitions.*¹

This continual and special presence of God that was the joy and glory and security of Israel is likewise one of the advantages of our seminary life. God is in our midst as he was with his chosen people.

Not only is God with us in his holy tabernacle whence his life is communicated to our souls, but here more than in any place in the world God makes his presence seen and felt. His loving eye is ever upon us; everything serves to recall his presence. The exhortations that we hear, the books that we read and study, all speak of him; and if we are faithful, our life will be an uninterrupted conversation with him. In our studies, at our meals and recreations, as well as at our devo-

¹ DEUT., 4⁷

tional exercises, God is near us, he is with us and in us.

4. *God placed his chosen people in possession of the promised land.* It was a blessed land, according to the expression of Holy Writ, flowing with milk and honey, a more delightful country than all others in the mildness of its climate, the charm of its situation, and the fertility of the soil. While Israel would remain faithful, they were to taste in this land promised to their fathers profound peace and, while awaiting the coming of the Messias, they were to enjoy abundance of all good things.

This peace and abundance by which God rewarded their fidelity is a figure of the blessings which he so abundantly showers upon us in the seminary. For him who knows how to appreciate the things of God, surely the seminary is a promised land of joy and plenty.

Here, as in the land of Israel, there reigns a sweet peace, the fruit of charity. What could be more calm, more exempt from preoccupation and anxiety than our life here? Outside there is perpetual trouble, agitation, solicitude, while here we taste the peace of God. What shall we say of the treasures of

grace that we receive, a thousand times more precious than the temporal prosperity of Israel? God showers upon us spiritual helps and means to holiness.

5. *God sent prophets to his chosen people.* To keep them in his love and in fidelity to his law, he sent authorized interpreters of his oracles, men of God whose duty it was to instruct, exhort, and reprove.

God has acted in a similar way towards us. Like Israel, we have need of advisers and guides to persevere in the faithful service of God, to correspond fully with his designs in our regard. It is not enough that a law has been given us unless that law be interpreted, commented upon, and applied. We need to be awakened when we have fallen asleep, to be sustained and fortified when we are discouraged, consoled when we are sad, recalled when we have wandered astray. In his merciful goodness, God has foreseen this need. He has placed at our side his representatives to whose care and watchfulness he has entrusted us. Clothed with his authority, filled with his spirit and love, they are the visible angels whom he has commissioned to show us the way, to warn us of the shoals, to protect us from danger. He

wishes us to obey them as we would him, to heed them as his representatives, to advance faithfully in the way which they mark out, assured that it is the way leading us to life.

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My God, the seminary is truly a blessed abode for me, where thy open hand never ceases to shower upon me graces and favors. I should not fail to thank thee; in fact my life in this house ought to be a continual act of thanksgiving. But is it so? Heretofore have I taken account of all the blessings which thy goodness has bestowed upon me?

Whereas the God-fearing Israelite found the manna delicious, the unfaithful Israelite found it insipid and bitter, and cried out: *Why didst thou bring us out of Egypt, to die in the wilderness? There is no bread, nor have we any waters: our soul now loatheth this very light food.*¹ Likewise, so long as a seminarian remains fervent he finds the restraint of the seminary a light burden, he bears it joyfully, he feels its sweetness which amply repays him for the sacrifices he has to

¹ NUM., 21⁵

make: but when he becomes lukewarm, he bears the burden with sad distastefulness; for him the rule is a heavy yoke from which he is eager to be free. Perchance he may even repeat in his heart the murmur of the Israelite: *Why didst thou bring us out of Egypt?*¹

My Savior, may I not be so unfortunate as to harbor these sentiments. Give me the grace better to appreciate the gifts of thy providence. Above all, grant that I may prepare myself to fulfill the divine mission which thou wilt soon entrust to me, that I may be a worthy precursor of thy advent into the souls of men.

I resolve:

1. To love the seminary, the rule, and all the means of sanctification that are offered to me;

2. To be more zealous in showing myself faithful in all things;

3. Frequently to thank God for having called me here.

*The Lord ruleth me: and I shall want nothing. He hath set me in a place of pasture.*²

¹ NUM., 21⁵ ² PS., 22¹⁻²

III

THE PRELUDE OF THE INCARNATION

SUMMARY

I. We will adore the incarnate Word who, even before his birth, filled the world with the expectation of his coming. The birth of the Savior is the culminating point and center of human history. The Old Testament is full of the thought of Jesus Christ. We will adore the divine Master in all the manifestations by which he appears to us.

II. We will consider that the Word incarnate manifested himself in three ways.

1. *Christ foreshadowed by types.* Most of the holy persons mentioned in the Old Law have been a living prophecy of Christ. Adam was the type of Christ, the head of the new race of saints. Abel, Noe, and Melchisedech were types of his priesthood. Isaac, Joseph, David, Jeremiah, of his quality of victim. Moses, Joshua, Zorobabel, and Solomon, of his quality of law-giver and king.

2. *Christ foretold by figures.* Such was the crossing of the Red Sea, the miraculous cloud, the manna, the brazen serpent. Such were especially the religious rites of the Jews: the tabernacle, the Passover, the sacrifices.

3. *Christ foretold by prophecies* which embraced our Lord's whole life: his twofold nature, the

circumstances of his birth, his life and public ministry, his passion and resurrection.

III. We will thank our Lord for thus sustaining our faith and nourishing our piety. We will ask ourselves whether we have vivid faith and fervent piety. We will long for the religious dispositions of the patriarchs.

We will resolve:

1. To be more attentive to the study of the holy books which make Christ known to us;

2. To entertain during this Advent those holy desires by which the just of the Old Law called upon the Messias.

O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and wouldst come down.

ADORATION

Let us adore the incarnate Word in that mysterious preëxistence by virtue of which, for a long time before his birth, he filled the world with the thought and expectation of his coming. St. Paul said to the Hebrews, *Jesus Christ, yesterday, and today; and the same for ever.*¹ In the history of the human race the birth of the Savior is indeed the culminating point that dominates all the rest, the center from which radiate all the events of our civilization.

¹ HEB., 13⁸

The modern world was born of Christ; the ancient world prepared the way for him. He was, in the providential plan of God, the reason for the political revolutions that took place on earth during thousands of years before his coming; and the empires that succeed one another form a chain terminating in the empire founded by him that will last till the end of time.

He was promised to the world to divinely repair the ravaging evils caused by sin. Paganism shared in the expectation of his advent; and, in the deluge which made the primitive traditions disappear, the belief in the Messiah was preserved more or less altered among all nations, both civilized and barbarous.

It was especially to safeguard this belief that God separated his chosen people from the other nations and entrusted to it the deposit of his holy truths. Thus the Old Testament, which is the history of Israel, is full of the thought of Jesus Christ. It is as a gospel where we find predicted what the evangelists relate. Such is the point of view taken by the Fathers in their study of the texts of the Bible. The Holy Spirit enabled them to see beneath the literal meaning of the text the mysteries of

Christ. His radiant figure appeared to them throughout. And they adored him with fervent love through the shadows of the old Law.

Let us adore this divine Master in all the manifestations by which he appears to us. In all he is worthy of our respect and love. We will soon pay homage to him in the crib where out of love for us he has willed to be born. Today let us honor him foreshadowing this divine mystery and, in order to prepare the world for his coming, manifesting himself by emblems and symbols. *I have spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions and I have used similitudes by the ministry of the prophets.*¹

CONSIDERATIONS

The Word incarnate, before his birth among us, manifested himself in the old covenant, prelude of the new, in three ways: by types, by figures, and by prophecies.

1. *The Messiah foreshadowed by types.* Most of the holy persons mentioned in the Bible have been a living prophecy of Christ. In their life and deeds they offered to the world an imperfect sketch of the life and deeds of the

¹ OSEE, 12¹⁰

Savior. In each of them we find reproduced some aspect of his divine physiognomy. In grouping the traits scattered in their history, we could obtain an image of the Savior.

Among these venerable types there are some which the Scriptures and the Fathers of the Church point out as having more striking resemblance with him.

Thus, according to St. Paul, Jesus, who is created in perfect justice and holiness, head of the new race of saints, has for his type Adam, the head of the human race, created by God in innocence. This is why he calls the Savior the new Adam. *The first man Adam was made into a living soul; the last Adam into a quickening spirit.*¹

Jesus is and forever will be the High Priest, alone able by his offering to satisfy divine justice. In this capacity he is predicted by Abel who first offers pleasing sacrifice to God; by Noe, who upon leaving the ark rendered the same homage to God in the name of creation purified by the deluge; by Melchisedech, priest and king, whose priesthood, like that of our Lord, appears to us surrounded by mysterious obscurities; lastly by Aaron, founder of that

¹ I COR., 15⁴⁵

Levitical priesthood which was the greatest institution of ancient times, the most perfect image of the Christian priesthood.

There are also types of our Lord as victim. Abel, unjustly slain by his brother; Isaac, carrying on his shoulders the wood of his sacrifice; Joseph, sold into Egypt, calumniated and reduced to the hard captivity from which he soon emerged justified and crowned with glory; David, persecuted by Saul, then betrayed, dethroned, obliged to flee before his son, climbing the Mount of Olives with a few faithful servants; Jeremiah, undergoing unjust treatment because he courageously announced the truth to kings and people. All these trials foreshadow the immolation of the Savior.

Our Lord himself gave us, as a type of his resurrection, the prophet Jonah coming forth from the whale's belly after three days.

Christ, by his death and resurrection, was our Redeemer. He has overcome our enemies, delivered us from captivity, and opened heaven which sin had closed. He is represented by Moses, the liberator of Israel; by Joshua, conqueror of the promised land; by the judges, combating the enemies of God;

by Zorobabel, who led the Jewish captives from Babylon to their own country.

The most glorious phase of the Hebrew people's history was the reign of Solomon, the peaceful king, wealthy prince, powerful and wise, to whom all the Orient turned attention. This monarch is the type of Christ in his royalty. Like Solomon, but infinitely more excellent and glorious, after all the struggles of his earthly life, he ascends to heaven where he reigns in the enjoyment of eternal bliss.

2. *Christ foretold by figures*, that is by the deeds and institutions through which, during the ages that preceded his coming, he was revealed to the world. *Now all these things happened to them in figure*, says St. Paul; *and they are written for our correction*.¹ The same apostle gives us a symbol of our redemption by Christ and of the graces that he merited for us, in the crossing of the Red Sea, in the miraculous cloud that conducted the Israelites across the desert, in the rock from which the water flowed in abundance.

The whole tradition of the Church has considered the manna which, for forty years,

¹ I COR., 10¹¹

nourished the people of God, as a striking figure of the Eucharist, the real bread from heaven in which Christ gives himself as the food of our souls during our pilgrimage on earth.

Lastly, our Lord himself sets forth, as a figure of his sacrifice on the cross, the brazen serpent raised by Moses in the desert, the sight of which saved those bitten by the serpents which were sent by God to chastise his people. *As Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him, may not perish; but may have life everlasting.*¹ So the power of Christ crucified cures those who invoke him from the more dreadful bite of the infernal serpent.

It is especially in the religious rites prescribed by God for his chosen people that our Savior is found most truly and vividly represented.

The tabernacle and later on the Temple where the Ark of the Covenant rested, where God pronounced his oracles, where the sacrifices were offered, where the Israelites united for prayer; these are images of Christ present

¹ JOHN, 3^{14, 15}

in the Church, the divine center of the worship which she renders to God.

The Jewish Passover, characterized by the immolation and eating of the paschal lamb is a figure of Christ the true paschal lamb immolated for us and become our food.

The sacrifices in their various forms express the different fruits of the sacrifice of the cross of which they are a foreshadowing, and which alone is efficacious in honoring God, in rendering thanks to him, in satisfying his justice, and obtaining his favors. Says St. Paul: *Every priest indeed standeth daily ministering, and often offering the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this man offering one sacrifice for sins, forever sitteth on the right hand of God. . . . For by one oblation he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.*¹

3. *Christ foretold by prophecies*, completing and explaining the types and figures which announce the Savior. Obscure and vague at first, they become more clear and precise from age to age and exhibit finally a sort of gospel in which all the mysteries of Christ are set forth, the details of his life related with mar-

¹ HEB., 10¹¹⁻¹⁴

velous exactness. Thus the Messianic tradition develops, reaching even beyond the limits of Judea and giving birth to that universal expectation of the Messias.

In grouping the prophecies which treat of Christ, without taking account of their chronological order, we may place them under seven heads so as to embrace the whole life of our Savior.

In the first place they acquaint us with the mystery of his two-fold nature. He is God, begotten before all time in the bosom of the Father, Son of God, Emmanuel. At the same time he is man, the son of man, servant of God and son of his handmaid; he will be born as one of us and will appear in the world as a little child.

The circumstances of his birth are pointed out. Daniel has indicated the precise date. Micheas has pointed out the place. Jacob predicted that he would spring from the tribe of Juda; David, that he would be an offspring of his race. Isaias foretold that he would be born of a virgin, and that the kings of the East would offer him gold and incense. Jeremias prophetically heard the lamentations of the mothers whose infants would be slain by Herod.

The life of the Messias, with all its characteristics, is described with no less precision. A precursor raised by God will prepare the way for his preaching. God will declare him to be his Son. The Spirit of God will rest upon him. He will possess divine knowledge; but his speech will be simple and familiar. He will preach to the poor. He will be full of compassion for the unfortunate. He will cure the sick. Even his triumphal entry into Jerusalem is described.

The passion of our Lord has been depicted by the prophets in astonishing detail. They have related the betrayal, the sacrilegious contract and the punishment of Judas; the cruel agony in the garden, the false witnesses, the ignominious tortures in the pretorium. They saw the Savior smitten with outrageous strokes, become a man of sorrow, assailed with opprobrium. Calvary appeared to them with its frightful suffering. David heard the blows of the hammer that nailed Christ's hands and feet to the cross; he assisted at the division of his garments; he saw the gall and vinegar drunk; and the Savior's last words were reported by him. An eye-witness of the crucifixion would not have described it more exactly.

To the passion succeeded the glories of the resurrection. This triumph was also predicted. The Christ will not see the corruption of the tomb and, having risen from the dead, will begin a reign that is to have no end.

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My Savior, it is not only in the Gospel and the writings of thy apostles that thou art presented for my adoration and love; all the Scriptures speak of thee. They are as a living picture in which thy sacred person, thy mysteries, virtues, prerogatives, and doctrine are unfolded before my eyes. What a support for my faith, what food for piety! In the presence of these prophetic announcements succeeding one another continually from the beginning, then being realized in thee with such a precision that thy prophets seem rather to be thy historians, can I doubt that thou art verily the Messiah promised to the world, the Emmanuel, the divine envoy sent by thy heavenly Father to redeem us?

If this be so, I ought to attach myself to thee; I ought to believe thy teaching, to practice thy maxims, to follow thy example, to live thy life; I should place all my confidence

and hope in thee, considering thee as the divine Mediator by whom I can attain my salvation.

Such are the dispositions which thy grace has formed in my soul. Grant that this meditation may make them more complete, filling me with that devotion to thee which animated the patriarchs, prophets, and all the just of the Old Law, which made them so ardently long for thy blessed coming. The inspired Word says that *these died according to faith, not having received the promises, but beholding them afar off*.¹ I have seen their expectation fulfilled; these blessings for which they sighed, I possess. May I appreciate this favor and show myself a faithful disciple of the incarnate Word.

I resolve:

1. To be more attentive to the study of the holy books which make Christ known to me;

2. To entertain during this Advent those holy desires by which the just of the Old Law called upon the Messias.

*O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and wouldst come down.*²

¹ HEB., 11¹³

² IS., 64¹

IV

THE LIFE OF JESUS IN MARY

SUMMARY

I. We will adore our Lord in the deep humility of his incarnation. It is in the virgin's womb, his sanctuary and throne, that he presents himself for our adoration. We will unite our homage to that rendered by the angels and will join in the dispositions of Mary's own heart.

II. We will consider that devotion to the mystery of Jesus living in Mary should attract us for three reasons:

1. *Considered in itself*, this state of the incarnate Word deserves our respect. In this state Jesus humbles himself before his heavenly Father, makes his blessed Mother participate in his graces, and testifies his great love for us. It contains in germ all the other mysteries of our Savior's life.

2. *This is especially the mystery of those who are cultivating the interior life.* Here all is interior and hidden. The life of Jesus in Mary is unnoticed by the great part of men. But we are among those called by God to practice the interior life.

3. *Devotion to this mystery enables us to adore the incarnate Word and honor his blessed Mother at the same time.* The divine plan presents a very intimate relation between Jesus and Mary, which is most strikingly expressed by this mystery. There-

in our Lord appears to us more amiable and merciful.

III. We will see that during this Advent we ought to adore the Savior in his blessed Mother, implore him to come and live in us, and imitate the dispositions which he manifested in this mystery.

We will resolve:

1. To honor in Mary the august sanctuary that Jesus chose as his first abode in our midst;

2. To enter into the dispositions of both Jesus and Mary in this mystery.

O Jesu, vivens in Maria, veni et vive in famulis tuis.

ADORATION

Let us adore our Lord in the unspeakable humility of his incarnation, recalling the words of St. Paul: *Semetipsum exinanivit*.¹ The Church thanks God for this wonderful mystery, recalling that, for our salvation, he did not hesitate to make himself like unto us, clothing himself with our nature, enclosing himself for nine months in the womb of a virgin: *Tu, ad liberandum suscepturus hominem, non horruisti virginis uterum*.²

It is there, in the virgin's womb, that our Savior now presents himself for our adoration. Before receiving our homage in the poor crib

¹ PHILIP., 27

² HYMN *Te Deum*

where he will soon be born, he wishes first to receive it in Mary. Her virginal womb is the sanctuary where, upon coming to earth, he reposes, a sanctuary that he had carefully preserved from the stain of sin, that he had enriched with graces and adorned with every virtue. Let us reverently and gratefully contemplate the Word made flesh in this sanctuary.

Let us unite our homage to that rendered by the angels, the first witnesses of this mystery. St. Paul tells us that God ordered these heavenly beings to adore Jesus Christ at his entrance into this world: *When he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith: And let all the angels of God adore him.*¹

Let us join in the dispositions of Mary's heart, her adoration of him whom she carried in her womb. It is easier for the heart to realize than for the lips to express that happy and holy intercourse that was established between Jesus living in Mary, and this mother, become the abode of her God whose life was mingled with her own. With what eager and grateful joy she must have repeated again and again these words of her canticle: *Magnificat*

¹ HEB., 1⁶

*anima mea Dominum . . . quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est.*¹

Let us ask the Blessed Virgin to make us share these dispositions, to permit us to honor the incarnate Word in her and with her, to offer him the homage of our adoration so that, coming to him through the heart of his mother it may be the more acceptable.

CONSIDERATIONS

Devotion to the mystery of Jesus living in Mary should attract us for three reasons.

1. *Considered in itself*, the life of Jesus in Mary deserves our respect. It is one of the states through which the Word made flesh willed to pass in carrying out the work of our redemption. It therefore has a place among the mysteries in the life of the Savior. As in all the others, our Lord is worthy of praise and benediction. Likewise he teaches therein a lesson, offers us a model, and merits grace for us.

In the first place, humbling himself in his human nature before his Father, he renders the most perfect religious adoration, conse-

¹ LUKE, 1⁴⁶, 49

crating himself to his Father by the purest and most ardent act of love that a created heart has ever produced. He constitutes himself a victim consecrating himself to the sacrifice, instead of the imperfect victims of the old Covenant.

At the same time he enriches his Blessed Mother with the most admirable gifts, making her participate in his graces, enlightening her mind, producing in her will acts of eminent virtue.

What love also he showed to us, offering himself as the ransom of sinners, longing for the moment when he would be permitted to redeem us by the pouring out of his blood: *I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized: and how am I straitened until it be accomplished?*¹

We may say that the life of Jesus in Mary is a résumé of all the mysteries of our Savior's life, containing them all in germ. Just as our spiritual and corporeal being in the perfection of manhood is only the development of what we were in germ before being born; so the interior and exterior life of Christ during the thirty-three years that he passed on earth, that he veils in our tabernacles, and that he

¹ LUKE, 12⁵⁰

manifests in glory, are but the unfolding of the mystery of his life in Mary. All the treasures of grace and holiness, all the virtues that he practiced, were there in his holy soul. *In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*¹

2. This is especially the mystery of those who are cultivating the interior life. Here all is interior and hidden; far from the sight of creatures, Christ is in a state of insensibility and apparent death, separated from the exterior world, unobserved and living only for God. Here our Savior is indeed a hidden God. Well may we apply to him the words of the prophet: *Verily thou art a hidden God, the God of Israel, the Savior.*²

The life of Jesus in Mary is, then, unnoticed by the great part of men. In his other states he finds worshippers. Soon we shall witness the pious gatherings of the faithful, come to adore the divine infant in the crib, offering gifts to him in company with the shepherds and the wise men. A few days after, when he will be presented in the Temple, many worshippers will unite with holy Simeon and the prophetess Anna to proclaim this infant

¹ COLOSS., 2³ ² IS., 45¹⁵

the light of the nations and the glory of Israel. Later on, when the Church will summon the faithful to hear the recital of Christ's suffering, her voice will be heard by a greater number. More still will join in the songs of triumph, the glory of the Resurrection and Ascension, the descent of the Holy Ghost on the apostles, the great blessing of our Lord's real presence under the sacred species.

But in the mystery of his life in Mary, Christ is forgotten, neglected, unknown. The Church herself, ordinarily so eager to honor her divine Spouse in all the states of his life, seems to have forgotten this mystery, for she has not established any special feast in its honor. God has permitted it to be so that those souls whom he calls to share his divine Son's interior life might have the consolation of paying homage to the incarnate Word in this mystery, urged only by their love. The more it is unknown to the great part of Christians, the more it stimulates their zeal to surround it with respect and honor.

We are among those called by God to practice the interior life. All the religious exercises of the seminary tend to develop it in us; it is the end we should constantly have be-

fore us, toward which all our efforts should be directed. *Primarius finis seminarii vivere summe Deo in Christo Jesu.* We ought then to have a great devotion to this mystery.

3. *Devotion to this mystery enables us to adore the incarnate Word and at the same time honor his blessed Mother.* The divine plan of redemption and of the supernatural order which it implies supposes a very intimate relation between Jesus and Mary. The mysteries of one blend, so to speak, with those of the other; the liturgy of the Church honors them by the same solemnities, which are at the same time feasts of Jesus and feasts of Mary. The Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin is also the incarnation of Jesus; incarnate in Mary, it is by her that he gives himself to us in the mystery of the Nativity; it is in her arms that he is presented to God in the Temple; it is at the request of his mother that he performs his first miracle; when he consummates his sacrifice, Mary is present and is associated with him in it. That union begun on earth is continued in heaven. He bestows his grace upon us through the intercession of Mary; whence the exceptional character distinguishing the veneration of the Blessed Virgin from that of the other saints.

Among all the Christian mysteries there is none that expresses more strikingly the intimate union of Jesus and Mary than that of his presence and his life in her. He lives her life and, so to speak, is not distinguished from her; he sees, hears, and acts through her.

In this mystery we can not go to Jesus except by way of Mary. She is the tabernacle in which the incarnate Word is presented to us. It is in Mary and by her that we contemplate him, pay homage to him, implore his assistance.

We know that the heart of Jesus is always ready to hear and heed our prayers and that we can turn to him in all our necessities with perfect confidence. But how greatly that confidence is strengthened and augmented when we address our prayers to him in Mary! Our Lord hears more gladly the petitions that come to him through the mediation of his blessed Mother.

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

The mystery of the life of Jesus in Mary is worthy of my respect and love. I ought always to honor it. But it should especially be the object of my devotion in Advent.

During this holy season I will seek to render homage to Jesus living in Mary. For this purpose I shall have three things to do.

The first will be to adore the Savior in his blessed Mother, to offer myself to him, to perform all my acts in his presence and in union with him. I will be particularly faithful to this practice in my exercises of piety, when assisting at mass, and at my visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

Secondly, I will implore this divine Master to come and live in me, to produce in my heart dispositions of humility, especially those which he manifests in this mystery, a detachment from all created things, profound humility, earnest zeal for my neighbor's salvation, perfect adoration of God, the spirit of immolation and sacrifice.

Thirdly, I will practice these same virtues, seeking to destroy in myself the least inordinate attachments, frequently making acts of mortification, renouncement and humility, trying to grow in the practice of the interior life.

Blessed Mary, such were undoubtedly the dispositions of your soul during the blessed months of his sojourn in you. You had the

same thoughts with him, you formed the same judgments, entertained the same desires, practiced the same virtues. Obtain for me, blessed Mother, the privilege of being also united to the incarnate Word, living his life, being animated by his spirit, faithfully following his inspirations.

I resolve:

1. To honor in Mary the august sanctuary that Jesus chose as his first abode in our midst;

2. To enter into the dispositions of both Jesus and Mary in this mystery.

O Jesu, vivens in Maria, veni et vive in famulis tuis.

V

THE VISITS OF JESUS

SUMMARY

I. We will adore the coming of the Savior. We will thank him for willing to renew this coming by his visits to our souls; and we will join with the just of the Old Law in an ardent desire for his coming, aiming at reproducing in our soul the dispositions of the Blessed Virgin.

II. We will consider that our Lord visits us in three ways.

1. *By his inspirations*; when he floods our minds with divine light and when he gives to our wills an impulse urging us towards God and makes it feel the need of recollection and prayer.

2. *By his consolations*. His coming was a cause of joy to the saints of the Old Law and to the shepherds of Bethlehem. Christ is also the true joy of the saints in heaven. And he gives us here below great consolations amidst the trials of our exile.

3. *By trials*. Our Lord often appears to us with his cross. Many scarcely recognize him. But his devoted disciples welcome him also when he brings trials to them. They rejoice more over trials than over consolations.

III. We will ask Our Lord to visit us often. We will acknowledge that sometimes we have refused

him admission to our heart. We will purpose to receive him always gladly in whatever manner he may come.

We will resolve:

1. Often to ask our Lord to establish his kingdom in our hearts;
2. To keep our hearts in perfect purity;
3. To profit by these visits and so progress in holiness.

To be with Jesus is a blessed paradise.

ADORATION

With profound reverence and grateful love, let us adore the coming of the Savior. During the time of Advent the Church invites us to meditate upon his coming and to prepare for it. The Redeemer, promised to the world and so long expected, has descended from heaven to visit us, console us in our exile, bestow his graces upon us, placing us again on the way to heaven which we had lost: *Visitavit nos oriens ex alto . . . ad dirigendos pedes nostros in viam pacis.*¹ The Word of God has clothed himself with our nature and has become visible on earth. This is the august mystery, the unfathomable testimony of God's love for us, about which

¹ LUKE, 1⁷⁸, 79

ought to center henceforth all the thoughts of our mind and the entire affection of our heart.

Although accomplished once in the fulness of time, it is renewed spiritually every year at the great feast of Christmas, when Jesus is born in our souls by a special communication of supernatural life which he brought with him when he came on earth.

But still more often he renews the blessed visit with which mankind was honored when he became incarnate and was born into this world. Is not the Christian life, indeed, a continual coming of Jesus to us? The eucharistic communion, contains the symbol thereof and is the loftiest expression of it. And this coming takes place under other forms also in which the divine mystery of the incarnation is extended and developed. *The Word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us.*¹

To enter into the spirit of holy Church, let us join with the patriarchs, the prophets, and all the just of the Old Law, greeting the Savior from afar with transports of joy. With their eagerness let us desire the Savior to communicate himself to our souls more and

¹ JOHN, 1¹⁴

more fully, to carry on in us that saving redemption which he came to accomplish. Let us thank him for wishing to visit us. Above all, let us prepare for his coming. In this work of preparation, Mary should be our model.

CONSIDERATIONS

Our Lord visits us by his inspirations, his consolations, and his trials.

1. *Our Lord visits us by his inspirations.* The first and principal fruit of his coming into the world was the diffusion of light and grace. *To enlighten them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death.*¹ *We saw his glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*² It is in this double manner that he reveals himself and gives himself to us exteriorly by the teachings of the Church and by the sacraments that she dispenses. He does so also in a more intimate and secret manner in the sanctuary of our soul where he makes known his will and helps us conform to it. Which of us has not at times been conscious of these divine communications?

¹ LUKE, 1⁷⁹

² JOHN, 1¹⁴

It happens sometimes that our mind is brightly illumined. We find ourselves flooded by an unknown splendor. Our faith becomes stronger, or perhaps one should say that it is momentarily transformed into that clear view of the truth of which we are some day to enjoy the permanent possession. God and his ineffable nature, Jesus and his sacred mysteries, the perfections of his divine person and the fruits of his redemption, the Church in which he continues to live and which he animates with his spirit, are manifested to us in the fulness of perfect day. The clouds are scattered. Prostrate before God, we cry out in our heart: *Credo, Domine*.

The will likewise feels an impulse urging it towards God. It feels a persistent need of recollection and prayer, self-denial and sacrifice. An interior impulse, it is, mild and strong, inviting and urging it. These are precious moments when everything seems easy, when it appears that nothing can stop the generous aspiration of the soul towards the perfect life. Who would fail to recognize then the characteristics of our Lord's inspirations? It is Jesus passing by, visiting us, knocking at the door of our heart. A thou-

sand times happy is the soul that admits him, opening its ears to his voice and ever ready to follow his invitations. *Behold, I stand at the gate, and knock, says the Savior. If any man shall hear my voice, and open the door to me, I will come in to him.*¹

2. *Our Lord visits us by his consolations.* His coming to earth was a cause of universal joy. The saints of the Old Law rejoiced. Abraham, said our Lord to the Jews, *rejoiced that he might see my day.*² What was it the angels announced to the shepherds? *Behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people: for this day is born to you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*³

Christ is the true joy of the saints in heaven. So, too, for his friends on earth. Although this present life is not for us the time of reward, yet he gives us unspeakable consolations amidst the bitter trials of our exile. Even our crosses and sacrifices contain a secret unction that compensates us for the sufferings we endure in his love. In the words of St. Paul: *I am filled with comfort, I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation.*⁴

¹ APOC., 3²⁰

² JOHN, 8⁵⁶

³ LUKE, 2¹⁰, 11

⁴ II COR., 7⁴

The consoling visits by which our Lord makes us feel the blessing of his presence, occupy a conspicuous place in the lives of the saints. And if we have not merited the overwhelming consolations vouchsafed the saints, yet, in the happy moments when our soul has been better disposed to receive our Lord's visits, have we not felt how good his presence is for those who love him? *To be with Jesus is a blessed paradise*, says the Imitation.¹

3. *Our Lord visits us by trials.* It is not always by consolation that our Lord reveals his presence to us. Often he appears carrying his cross, his head crowned with thorns, his face bruised and bleeding. It is in this guise that he invites us to follow him. It is Calvary with its darkness, its anguish, its abandonment. Many there are who scarcely recognize the Lord when he comes in this form of sadness and humiliation. They fail to understand the priceless value of such a visit. And instead of rejoicing because he had judged them worthy of participating in the mystery of his suffering, they are discouraged and left disconsolate.

¹ IMIT. II, 8²

It is not so for those whose Christian life is deeply rooted. Gratefully they receive our Lord when he brings them consolation; with equal readiness they welcome him when he brings trials to them. For them he is always beautiful, lovable, worthy of receiving their adoration and praise.

Well instructed in the school of Christ, they know that the way of Calvary will conduct them more surely to their life's goal, that, although it is more pleasant to rejoice, it is more useful and meritorious, more sanctifying to suffer. So, when Christ visits them with his cross, far from complaining, they rejoice. It is Jesus who asks them to partake of his chalice, to join in his sacrifice, to undergo the immolation with him. This thought is enough to make them forget the bitterness of their trials and even to find sweetness in tribulation.

This was the thought of the apostles after they had been scourged by the Synagogue. *And they indeed went from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus.*¹ *Rejoice,*

¹ACTS, 5⁴¹

said St. Peter, to the faithful of his time, *being partakers of the sufferings of Christ*.¹

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Divine Master, deign often to honor me with thy visits. In thee is my strength, my light, my joy, my consolation. Without thee I am poor, with thee rich. Come to me, then, with all thy treasures, to communicate thy holiness to me, to exercise thy power in my soul, to make me partake of the grace which thy mysteries contain. But there are obstacles that hinder thy operations in me, preventing me from being directed by thy inspirations and profiting by the trials which thou permittest me to undergo.

How often in the past thou hast in vain knocked at the door of my heart! Distracted by other preoccupations, I did not recognize thy voice; because of inordinate attachments, I had not the courage to heed it. Grant that I become not guilty of such unfaithfulness any more. In whatever manner thou comest, may I always open my heart to thee.

I resolve:

¹ I PETER, 4¹³

1. Often to ask our Lord to establish his kingdom in my heart;
2. To keep my heart in perfect purity;
3. Faithfully to profit by these visits and so progress in holiness.

To be with Jesus is a blessed paradise.¹

¹ IMIT. II, 8¹

VI

PREPARING FOR CHRISTMAS

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore God preparing the world for the birth of his Son. We will enter into the dispositions of the saints of the Old Law.
- II. We will consider that our Lord at his coming likes to find in us recollection, humility, and purity of heart.

1. *Recollection.* Our Savior came into the world in the silence of night, far from human habitation, at a time when the world was at peace. So, in preparing for his coming, we should remove from our souls all distraction, strife, and anxiety.

2. *Humility.* The Incarnation is a mystery of humility whether considered in itself, its end, or its circumstances. How suitable, therefore, is the practice of humility as a preparation for Christmas.

3. *Purity of heart.* The new-born Savior is purity itself. Mary, his mother, is immaculate. We should strive to banish from our hearts all mortal sin and every attachment that is even venially sinful.

- III. We will ask ourselves whether in the past we have seriously cultivated these three dispositions as a preparation for Christmas. We will ask of our divine Master that he remove all obstacles to his coming into our hearts.

We will resolve:

1. To remove the causes of distraction that interfere with the spirit of recollection;

2. To remember our own weakness and need of God's help;

3. To examine our conscience for the presence of attachments that weaken the generosity of our self-sacrifice.

Be prepared to meet thy God.

ADORATION

Let us adore God preparing the world during many ages for the birth of his Son. And let us adore him inspiring the Church to institute the season of Advent during which she invites us to prepare for this solemnity which yearly commemorates that blessed nativity.

To enter into the spirit of holy Church and prepare for the great feast that is coming, let us renew within ourselves the dispositions with which the saints of the Old Law were inspired at the thought of the Messias. We find them summed up in the beautiful anthems of the Breviary during this season. O eternal Wisdom, born of the Most High; Adonai, divine head of the house of Israel; Root of Jesse; Key of David; Orient, splendor of eternal light; desired King of the nations;

Emmanuel, our Lawgiver and our King;
*come to teach us; come to redeem us; come to
free us; come to enlighten us sitting in darkness;
come to save us; do not delay.*¹

CONSIDERATIONS

When the time approached for the Blessed Virgin to bring forth the divine Infant, she and St. Joseph prepared the swaddling clothes and a crib. For the latter they could find only a manger in which to place the new-born King. On Christmas the Savior is, so to speak, born again. But this time our souls will take the place of the crib. What care we should take to prepare them for the reception of the divine Guest! On the day of his birth our Lord ought to find in us recollection, humility, and purity of heart. In acquiring these dispositions or perfecting them should consist our preparation for Christmas.

1. *Recollection.* When the Savior came into the world, the wars which were harassing and dividing the nations, had ceased. For the first time in centuries the entire world was at peace. This divine birth took place in the silence of the

¹ ANTIPHONS OF ADVENT

night when all nature is calm and quiet. It occurred not in the midst of tumult, but in the quiet of a little country stable. That peace and silence which accompanied the Savior's birth is an image of the profound recollection which should be found in the Christian soul that is going to the crib of the divine Infant. Only if we are recollected, will we hear our Savior's words, and will he bestow upon us the light and consolation of his presence. The more complete the silence reigning in our hearts, the more disposed we are to receive the gifts of God. This is why the saints loved solitude.

As we wish Christ to make us share the blessing of his divine presence, let us remove all dissipation and tumult from our souls. Let us establish peace within us. If we acquire this precious peace, our Lord will give himself to us and the mystery of Christmas will be renewed within us.

Whence come our troubles, anxieties, worries? From the multiplicity of masters we try to serve. We wish to belong to God and at the same time to serve our passions, our caprices. Hence the struggle that makes of our soul a battle-field full of trouble and confusion.

God should be our only Master, he alone should reign within us, all the powers of our soul should be united in harmonious submission to him to fulfill his holy will. Then there will be peace in our souls and the Savior will come to us.

2. *Humility.* The Incarnation is par excellence a mystery of humility. *Semetipsum exinanivit*¹ says St. Paul. The divine Word descends, so to speak, from the throne of his glory and under the veil of human flesh conceals his divine perfections. He who was God becomes as one of us and to save us clothes himself in our miseries and infirmities. *In similitudinem hominum factus et habitu inventus ut homo.*

The Son of God became man to elevate fallen humanity and to cure the wounds that sin had made. His incarnation reveals to us both the deplorable state to which we were reduced and our powerlessness to arise without divine help. So it is for us a lesson of humility and a remedy for the illusions of pride.

In the circumstances of the Incarnation and the manner in which it was accomplished we perceive still more a mystery of humility. God came to the world in the humble form of

¹ PHILIP, 2⁷

a little infant, born in a stable, with a manger for his crib. He appears to us in the garb of poverty, condemning pomp and grandeur by his example.

How suitable, therefore, is the practice of humility as a preparation for the celebration of his birth. Our Lord loves this virtue; he recommended and practiced it; and, of all the vices, pride was the one that he attacked with the greatest severity. During his life he graciously received most wretched sinners and showed himself full of mercy for their weakness. But without mercy he anathematized the haughty Pharisees, whose virtues were only the ostentation of vanity.

If we wish our Lord to dwell in our hearts on Christmas day, we must, after his example, be humble. When we go to the crib to offer Jesus our homage and to ask his graces, let us see to it that he discover in our hearts nothing that is not in harmony with the humility which he manifests to us. On this condition will our Savior, so mild and humble of heart, receive our offering, hear our prayers, and make us participate in the blessings of his birth.

3. *Purity of heart.* The Incarnation is a mystery of purity as well as of humility. In

this mystery the Son of God became like unto us in all but sin. Mary, his mother, miraculously preserved from original sin and from every stain of sin, conceived and brought forth the Word made flesh while still keeping her virginity.

We, too, must be pure to receive our Lord. He can take up his abode in our hearts only to reign there supreme. But this reign is incompatible with the reign of sin. Mortal sin would be an insurmountable obstacle to the establishment of his kingdom. The attachments, venially sinful, that we might lack the courage to renounce, would be opposed to the full development of that kingdom. The life of Jesus in a soul from which sin is not completely banished, is constrained and impeded. Our Lord is prodigal in bestowing his graces upon a pure heart devoted to him alone. To a soul that gives itself to him only in part he does not give himself entirely.

How important it is for us, before approaching the crib, before adoring the divine Infant, to remove from our heart all that would alter its purity. Let every sinful attachment be banished and so we can offer to Jesus an abode less unworthy of him.

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My Savior, I wish to prepare for the blessed solemnity of thy birth with all possible fervor. I will contemplate thy divine features and join with Mary and Joseph, thy faithful adorers, in offering my homage. In return for the love which thou showest for me in this mystery, I wish to give myself entirely to thee.

Christmas is not only a memorial to recall thy advent; it is also the renewal of thy coming. It is thy wish to be born again, not in the crib, but in our hearts. Have I each year, according to the mind of the Church, consecrated the four weeks of Advent to the preparation of my heart for the coming of the divine Infant? Have I cultivated the threefold disposition of recollection, humility, and purity of heart?

Have I with more than ordinary care applied myself to the cultivation of the interior life during this holy season? Have I been more recollected, more united to God, more humble in my daily life? And will the Savior find in my heart no obstacles to his perfect reign therein? Divine Master, remove all such obstacles.

I resolve:

1. To remove the causes of distraction that interfere with the spirit of recollection;

2. To remember my own weakness and need of God's help, thus cultivating a spirit of genuine humility;

3. To examine my conscience for the presence of attachments that weaken the generosity of my self-sacrifice.

*Be prepared to meet thy God.*¹

¹ AMOS, 4¹²

VII

CHRISTMAS

SUMMARY

I. We will prostrate ourselves in spirit before the new-born Savior and make an act of faith in the mystery of the Incarnation. We will listen to the praises that resound in heaven and on earth in his honor.

II. We will consider that in this mystery God shows his love for us in three ways.

1. *He manifests himself to us.* Before the Incarnation God seemed to be afar off in his inaccessible majesty. And yet man felt the need of seeing God. At length God did show himself to man. It is no longer the voice of prophets but his own that we hear. He has dwelt among us.

2. *He gives himself to us.* This little child is of our race, he belongs to us. He became the companion of our exile, our victim on the cross, our spiritual food in the Eucharist, our eternal reward in heaven. A complete gift which the mystery of the crib announces and promises.

3. *He unites himself to us,* associating us with his life, making us members of his body. This union begins at baptism and is especially developed by holy communion.

III. We will ask ourselves whether we appreciate the claim which our Lord has on our love. We

will thank him for having entered the world as a little infant, in meekness and poverty. We will offer him the entire love of our hearts.

We will resolve:

1. To banish from our hearts every affection and attachment that may be opposed to the love of Christ;

2. To ask the infant Savior to enkindle his love in our hearts.

I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly.

ADORATION

Let us prostrate ourselves in spirit before the new-born Savior. Let us make an act of faith in the reality of his twofold nature and the unity of his divine person. In this little Infant let us recognize and adore our King, our Redeemer, our God, the Messiah for whom the prophets longed. *This is our God, says Isaias; we have waited for him, and he will save us. This is the Lord.*¹

So as to offer the infant Savior more profound adoration, more enthusiastic praise, so as to give him a more generous and fervent love, let us listen to the praises that resound in heaven and on earth in his honor.

¹ Is., 25⁹

The august Trinity turns to this poor crib with infinite love. The angels, witnesses of this mystery were the first called to adore the new-born Savior. How they sang in the midnight heavens: *Gloria in excelsis Deo*. The life of the Church on earth will ever be a continual hymn of adoration and praise in honor of the incarnate Word. There was also the homage offered to him by Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, and the magi. And today there is the love and thanksgiving which the annual solemnity of Christmas elicits in the hearts of pious Christians. Let us join with humble love in these acts of adoration and thanksgiving.

CONSIDERATIONS

In the Nativity, God shows his love for us in three ways: by manifesting himself to us, by giving himself to us, and by uniting himself to us.

1. *God shows himself to us.* Before the Incarnation, although everywhere present by his infinite being, yet he seemed to be afar off in his inaccessible majesty. He hid himself from our eyes and, according to a belief of Israel no one could see him without dying.

But man feels the need of seeing God. A hidden God inaccessible to human eyes, does not satisfy him. To meet this need, paganism invented idols of wood and stone and metal, bestowing its adoration upon vain images.

But in the fulness of time God did show himself to man. By an admirable device of his love, bridging the space that separated us from him, he came to us, assumed our nature, took the form of a man like unto us so that our eyes might behold him, our hands touch him. *Afterwards he was seen upon earth, says the prophet, and conversed with men.*¹ And his beloved apostle adds: *We saw his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.*²

Formerly he spoke to man by the voice of prophets and the messages of angels. At last it is his own voice we hear. *God having spoken, says St. Paul, on divers occasions, and many ways, in times past, to the fathers by the prophets: last of all in these days hath spoken to us by his Son.*³ Moses, speaking of the ark which accompanied the people of Israel in their camp, rejoiced that *neither is there any other nation so great, that hath its Gods so nigh*

¹ BAR., 3³⁸² JOHN, 1¹⁴³ HEB., 1¹⁻²

*them, as our God is present to all our petitions.*¹ But what was their privilege compared with that conferred upon Christians by the Incarnation?

2. *God gives himself to us.* He came into our midst not only to receive the homage of our adoration, but to belong to us, to bestow himself upon us without reserve. *Parvulus natus est nobis.*² In becoming man he became the companion of our exile and henceforth, until the end of time, he will not leave the earth. After thirty-three years of our life, he continues to dwell with us in the sacrament of his love. *Se nascens dedit socium.*

By a still more remarkable gift, he has become our spiritual nourishment. There is nothing more intimately ours than the food that is assimilated into our very substance. But God incarnate is truly the food of our soul. *Convalescens in edulium.* On the cross he became our victim. *Se moriens in pretium.* And in the glory of heaven he gives himself to the elect, to be their eternal reward. *Se regnans dat in praemium.*³

Can there be a more precious gift? The mystery of the crib is its promise. Is not the

¹ DEUT., 47 ² IS., 96 ³ Hymn of the B. Sacr.

infant form under which the incarnate Word appears to us most expressive of the completeness with which God gives himself to us? During his whole life he fulfilled that promise. Not even a word fell from his lips that had not our salvation for its object. *Propter nos homines et propter nostram salutem.*¹

3. *God unites himself to us*, associating us with his life, making us members of his body, in a certain way, other Christs. *I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly.*² But this life that he wishes to communicate to us in uniting Himself to our souls is the very life of God which was poured into the Savior's humanity by reason of its union with the Word. The union of Jesus to the Christian soul is the foundation of the whole supernatural order. By it man is elevated to the participation in the divine nature and with man the whole universe is ennobled. *For all things are yours*, says St. Paul. *And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.*³ A wonderful dispensation indeed! The sacred humanity of Christ, united to the Word by the Incarnation, became one person with it. We are united to Christ by a union less per-

¹ NICENE CREED² JOHN, 10¹⁰³ I COR., 3²²⁻²³

fect, to be sure, but still very intimate. We belong to him as members belong to a body. *You are Christ's*. And as the whole creation has in man its epitome and finality, *all things are yours*, it is, through man, united with Christ and, as it were, deified. So, according to the sublime phrase of the *Martyrology*, the Word, by his advent, *consecrated* the world: *Jesus Christus Dei Filius mundum volens adventu suo piissimo consecrare nascitur ex Maria Virgine*.¹

This precious fruit of the Incarnation begins at baptism, our initiation into the supernatural life. It is developed by the many communications of divine grace, especially by holy communion, in which Christ gives himself to us as a food really and substantially. It will be consummated in heaven.

This is the foundation of the eminent dignity of a Christian, the source of the supernatural and meritorious value of our acts which, being performed under the influence of Christ living in us, belong to him in a certain way, and consequently assume a divine form. St. Paul expressed this truth when he said: *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ*

¹ ROMAN MARTYROLOGY, DEC. 25

*Jesus in good works; which God hath prepared that we should walk in them.*¹ It is in this sense that St. Peter says: *All things of his divine power are given to us . . . that by these you may be made partakers of the divine nature.*²

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

In this mystery of his birth, as in all the mysteries of his life, Jesus has a right to the homage of our adoration; but he has especially a right to our love. In giving himself to us, he has given the most striking proof of his love for us. *Because he first loved us*, says St. John.³

My Savior, was it not to arouse love in us that thou didst appear in our midst as a little infant, in meekness and poverty? Thou couldst have entered the world in the fulness of manhood. But to win our hearts thou didst prefer to pass through the weakness of infancy. St. Bernard justly says that if our Lord in his majesty deserves our praise, in his infancy he deserves our love.

Equally so by reason of the poverty that surrounded that infancy. That stable and

¹ EPHES., 2¹⁰

² II PETER, 1³⁻⁴

³ I JOHN, 4¹⁰

manger, those swaddling clothes, speak to my heart more powerfully than the most eloquent discourse. Hadst thou come in the splendor that surrounds the children of earthly kings, thou wouldst have appeared less deserving of my love.

I wish, my Savior, to love thee with all the power of my soul. Thou dost ask of me my heart. May it be henceforth all thine. Thou givest thyself to me in the mystery of thy birth. Is it not right that I should live and labor for thee alone?

I resolve:

1. To banish from my heart every affection and attachment that may be opposed to the love of Christ;
2. To ask the infant Savior to enkindle his love in my heart.

I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly.¹

¹ JOHN, 10¹⁰

VIII

DEVOTION TO THE INFANT SAVIOR

SUMMARY

- I. We will call to mind the stable of Bethlehem. We will adore our Redeemer, notwithstanding the poverty that surrounds him. We will ask this divine Infant to make us understand and cherish this holy mystery.
- II. We will consider three reasons for devotion to the infant Savior.
 1. *His invitation.* For us he came on earth. He calls us as he did the wise men and the shepherds.
 2. *His amiability.* The incarnate Word is infinitely deserving of our love. In all the mysteries of his life, but especially in the crib, his divine amiability is revealed to us. If this mystery left us unmoved, where would be our Christian faith?
 3. *His treasures.* Although poor in appearance, he possesses all the treasures of heaven and earth. And all these belong to us. From his crib, as from a throne of mercy and love, he bestows the life of God upon us.
- III. We will ask ourselves whether in the past the solemnities of Christmas have increased our devotion to the infant Savior. We will confess that we are far from possessing that love for him which

we ought to have. We will pray that he may teach us to give ourselves entirely to him.

We will resolve:

1. To cultivate a simple devotion to the infant Savior;

2. To make of our life a constant act of gratitude to the Savior who was born into this world for us.

Sic nos amantem quis non redamaret?

ADORATION

Let us call to mind the stable where our Savior was born. The poverty of the place was extreme, for it was merely a shelter for the beasts of the field. And yet such was the spot chosen by the incarnate Word for his birth among men. Let us look at him lying in the manger and acknowledge him as our divine Master and Redeemer. *Ecce Deus noster iste.*¹ This poor infant is he whom the world had been expecting for centuries, whom the prophets announced, whose coming the just so ardently desired, the infant born of a virgin as foretold by the prophet Isaias, Emmanuel; God with us, *Verbum caro factum.*²

Let us enliven our faith and adore the God of heaven in this babe of Bethlehem. With

¹ Is., 25⁹ ² JOHN, 1¹⁴

gladness, love, and thanksgiving let us welcome this infant who comes to be our friend, our brother, to belong to us unreservedly; to give his blood, his very life for us. And let us offer ourselves to this loving Savior.

My Jesus enlighten my mind and expand my heart that I may understand and cherish this holy mystery. During this holy season, may I find comfort in contemplating thy divine features and meditating upon thy humiliations with gratitude and love.

CONSIDERATIONS

Let us consider three motives for devotion to the infant Savior.

1. *His invitation.* It is for us that he came on earth. His incarnation has no other end but our sanctification and salvation. To profit by his coming, we must go to him.

He calls us. The first need of his heart is to see us gathered about his crib. He urges us to seek near him that rest and consolation which none other can give. *Come to me, all you that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.*¹

¹ MATT., 11²⁸

Although he has not yet sent his apostles forth to preach the good news of his coming to the whole world, yet he signalizes his birth by prodigies. In the east the wise men see his star. And while they behold this wonder in the heavens, a powerful impulse moves them to go in search of the new-born King. At the same time the shepherds of Bethlehem hear the heavenly message, for angels appear to them, announcing that the Savior is born, and inviting them to go and adore him.

My Savior, thou dost wish to be known, loved, adored, or rather thou dost wish to give thyself to others. What thou didst in an external manner at the time of thy birth, thou dost now in the depths of our hearts by the hidden operation of thy grace. We do not see the star that led the magi; we do not hear the invitation of the angels. But do we not feel an interior call, especially during the solemnities of Christmas, urging us to adore thee? Is not this thy voice calling us? *The voice of my beloved; behold, he cometh.*¹

2. *The amiability of the infant Savior.* The Word made flesh is infinitely deserving of our love. All lovable traits, both human and

¹ CANT., 2⁸

divine, are united in his person. The perfections of his soul reflected in his features, his whole outward aspect, the words that he uttered, drew to him during his mortal life multitudes of followers more effectively than the miracles that he worked.

Especially in the mystery of the manger his divine amiability is revealed to us. Elsewhere his mildness and kindness draw us towards him but with respectful fear. But in the mystery of Bethlehem his greatness is veiled, his majesty is hidden, his power is concealed. He is a little infant, feeble, humble, amiable. *Parvulus Dominus et amabilis nimis*, exclaimed St. Bernard.

The Christian soul feels gently drawn to this divine Infant who, coming from heaven into our midst, found only a stable for his shelter, a manger for his crib, some straw for his bed. If the contemplation of this mystery left me unmoved, where would be my Christian faith; could I, my Jesus, call myself thy disciple?

3. *The treasures of the infant Savior.* Although in appearance poor and helpless, the divine Infant possesses in reality all the treasures of heaven and earth. But despising

earthly riches, he comes to us with the riches of the other world, full of grace and truth. *We saw his glory*, says St. John, *the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*¹ In whom, St. Paul says, *are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*²

As St. Bernard says: *In Christ there is the fulness of possession, without number or measure.* And all these belong to us. For whatever he possesses is ours. He came on earth to enrich us with his divine gifts, and he begins this work in the crib. The work of our redemption was begun at the outset of our Savior's mortal life. And all the mysteries of that life are a source of light and grace for us.

In the mystery of our Lord's birth, he gives himself to us. His crib becomes a throne of mercy and love. There he bestows upon us abundantly the life of God, enlightening our minds with his truth, filling our hearts with the consolations of his peace, beginning in us the transformation that will make us participate in his divine nature. In the words of St. Peter: *By whom he hath given us very great*

¹ JOHN, 1¹⁴² COLOSS., 2³

*and precious promises, that by these you may be made partakers of the divine nature.*¹

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Have the solemnities of this holy season increased my devotion to the infant Savior? I should possess a vivid faith in the profound mysteries of Christ's birth; and as a consequence, an ever increasing love and devotion towards the divine Infant of Bethlehem.

In a special manner this mystery is realized by my communions, Christ being, so to speak, born again within me. Have I coöperated with this grace as I should?

And have I an ardent love for the new-born Savior? Am I inwardly drawn to his crib as are all pious Christians during this blessed season? Do the expressions of simple and fervent love, which are contained in the liturgy and in the writings of the saints, find an echo in my soul?

My infant Savior, I am far from possessing that love for thee which I ought to have. Enkindle it in my heart. May I love thee above all things, more than myself. And

¹ II PETER, 1⁴

since thou givest thyself to me, may I learn to give myself entirely to thee.

I resolve:

1. To cultivate a simple devotion to the infant Savior;

2. To make my life a constant act of gratitude to the Savior who was born into this world for me.

*Sic nos amantem quis non redamaret?*¹

¹ LITURGY OF CHRISTMAS

IX

THE CIRCUMCISION

SUMMARY

I. We will adore the infant Savior submitting to the law of circumcision. He renews the offering of himself to God. The more he humbles himself, the more does he deserve our praise.

II. The circumcision of our Lord presents three mystical meanings.

1. *It crowned the reign of the Old Law.* Circumcision was the essential condition for belonging to the chosen people and for being separated from the idolatrous Gentiles. By his circumcision Christ declares himself a son of Abraham and sanctifies the rites of the Mosaic Law, thus ushering the religion of Moses into Christianity.

2. *It inaugurated the reign of grace.* All Saint Paul's spiritual doctrine concerning holiness is based on the symbolism of this ancient rite. It signifies renunciation and sums up the whole gospel. Christ thereby teaches us to keep free from evil and even to deny ourselves what is not sinful.

3. *It precluded the reign of glory.* By circumcision the Hebrew became pure and holy in the eyes of the Law. At the resurrection we will be free from the grosser elements of mortality. And we will receive a new name for eternity.

III. We will ask ourselves whether we have sufficiently loved, admired, and imitated our Lord in the mystery of his circumcision. We will ask him to accomplish spiritual circumcision within us.

We will resolve to coöperate with the grace of spiritual circumcision by the practice of mortification.

We are the circumcision, who serve God in spirit.

ADORATION

In his very infancy our Lord began the series of mysteries by which he accomplished our redemption. The first in the order of time was the circumcision. Eight days after his birth he willed to undergo that painful operation in which he shed his blood, as the prelude to the immolation of Calvary.

Let us adore the infant Savior submitting to a law from which the dignity of his divine person, it would seem to us, should have exempted him. To enter more perfectly into the spirit of this mystery, let us in thought penetrate our Savior's soul and there see his dispositions while the external rite is being performed. He renews the offering of himself to God the Father which he made at his entrance into the world. He submits to everything that the rôle of Mediator and Redeemer

will exact of him, saying in his heart what he repeated with his lips at the time of his baptism: *So it becometh us to fulfill all justice.*¹

While the first drops of his blood are shed, he accepts in advance that more complete pouring forth of his blood that will take place at his passion and crucifixion. He receives the name of Jesus, bestowed upon him by the explicit will of God and which will be a perpetual reminder of the work that he undertakes. The more he humbles himself, the more does he deserve our praise, our adoration, and our thanksgiving.

CONSIDERATIONS

The ceremony of circumcision presents three mystical meanings: it was the distinctive mark of the descendants of Abraham and the sign of holiness according to the law; it is the symbol of Christian holiness; and it expresses the sanctity of the blessed after their resurrection. It crowned the reign of the Old Law, inaugurated the reign of grace, and preluded the reign of glory.

1. *The circumcision of our Lord crowned the reign of the Old Law.* The whole Mosaic re-

¹ MATT., 3¹⁵

ligion rested on this venerable rite which was the seal of the alliance between God and his people, the essential condition for participation in the religious and political rights of the chosen people. Every Israelite had to be circumcised. He was thereby separated from the impure and idolatrous Gentile; he became holy and consecrated to God. Thus circumcision held first place among the sacraments of the Old Law, imperfect figures of those which, under the New Law, are channels of grace.

The end of the law is Christ, says St. Paul;¹ because the Law had no other purpose but to prepare for his coming and because all the types and figures that it contained were to be realized in him and because he was for the Jewish Church what he is for the Christian, the foundation and the crown of the structure. He must, therefore, carry out all the prescriptions of the Law. That is why he submits to the ceremony of circumcision.

Thus he declares himself a son of Abraham, who was the father of the believers. And thus, in approving and sanctifying the rites of the synagogue, he gives them a value which

¹ ROM., 10⁴

of themselves they did not possess. The venerable synagogue, about to give place to the Christian Church, finds its perfection in Christ: *Finis legis Christus*.

The Church is, properly speaking, the continuation of a religious society that goes back to the first ages of the world. Christ is initiated into this society by circumcision, and thereby relates it to the Gospel. Christianity is Judaism expanded, enlarged, completed by the fusion of the Jew and Gentile into the one people. *Who hath made both one.*¹

2. *The circumcision of our Lord inaugurated the reign of grace.* All St. Paul's spiritual doctrine, all his rules of the Christian life, all his theory of holiness rest upon the symbolism of this ancient rite. According to him the duties of a Christian are summed up in a spiritual circumcision: *In whom also you are circumcised*, he says, *with a circumcision not made by hand . . . but in the circumcision of Christ*,² the renouncing of concupiscence and the corrupt desires of the heart. *The circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit.*³

The circumcision thus understood is the résumé of the gospel. It is the spirit of pov-

¹ EPHES., 2¹⁴² COLOSS., 2¹¹³ ROM., 2²⁹

erty, that is detachment from earthly riches; of mortification, that is detachment from worldly pleasures; of humility, that is detachment from pride and vain glory. In short, it is Christian perfection. The gospel is but the development of these holy maxims, the lesson taught us by Christ in his circumcision.

This spiritual circumcision which Christ requires of his disciples consists not merely in keeping free from evil. We must combat by mortification the evil inclinations of our rebellious nature, not only giving up what might be sinful, but even denying ourselves what we might enjoy without sin. *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.*¹

While giving us this teaching in the mystery of his circumcision, our Lord has also merited for us the grace to follow that teaching; the grace of strength to aid us in overcoming the weakness of our fallen nature and of courage for the battle that will take place in our own heart.

3. *The circumcision of our Lord preluded the reign of glory.* Every descendant of Abraham, eight days after his birth, had to be

¹ MATT., 16²⁴

circumcised and thereby became pure and holy in the eyes of the law. So the Christian at the resurrection, after having undergone the corruption of the tomb, will enter upon a new state wherein, freed from the grosser and impure elements of mortality, he will appear surrounded by glory and holiness. He will no longer be contaminated and weighed down by the concupiscence of corrupt mortality. *Unhappy man that I am*, says St. Paul, *who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*¹

The Israelite was given a name at his circumcision. Likewise the Christian, marked with the seal of the elect, will receive a new name to designate him eternally in the assembly of the saints. In the Book of Isaias we read: *The Lord God . . . shall call his servants by another name.*² And in Baruch: *Thy name shall be named to thee by God for ever.*³

Our Lord by his circumcision inaugurated not only the reign of grace and Christian perfection, but, according to the most sublime interpretation of this mystery, he preluded the reign of glory. Heaven, closed by sin, was no longer accessible to us. The name of Jesus, Savior, bestowed on our Lord, renews

¹ ROM., 7²⁴ ² IS., 65¹⁵ ³ BARUCH, 5⁴

our hope, shows us a Redeemer who will deliver us from sin and its unhappy consequences and will restore to us our right to the heavenly inheritance.

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

The words of St. Bernard tell us briefly the practical conclusions that we should draw from this meditation: *In the circumcision of our Lord we have what we should love and admire, we have also what we should imitate.*¹

Christ, inspired by his love for us, undergoes this painful ceremony and, by receiving the name of Jesus, inaugurates his mission of redemption. We should, then, love this mystery. Although infinitely great, he humbled himself to this rite of initiation, although above the law, he obeys its prescriptions. This should arouse our admiration. He appears to us as the model and type of the Christian life which consists in renouncing all evil desires, symbolized by carnal circumcision. This we should imitate.

My Savior, thou wouldst have us a holy people in thee and by thee, separated from all

¹ SERM. III in *Circ. Dom.*

that is impure and profane, wholly consecrated to God. *You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people.*¹ This is indeed our duty by virtue of our regeneration in Baptism. Even more strictly are we bound to it by the sacred character or ordination. Grant that we may conform to thy adorable designs. Accomplish in us that spiritual circumcision which thou didst symbolize by thy bodily circumcision; and having removed from our soul the stain of sin, imprint thereon the seal of divine charity.

I resolve to coöperate with the grace of spiritual circumcision by the practice of mortification.

*We are the circumcision, who serve God in spirit.*²



¹ I PETER, 2^o

² PHILIP., 3^s

X

TIME

SUMMARY

I. We will adore our Lord submitting, in his human nature, to the vicissitudes of time. He willed to undergo the common lot of human existence. At all times he is equally beautiful and worthy of love. By his example he taught us the use of time.

II. We will consider:

1. *The figure of the passing world.* It is Saint Paul's expression, verified by every day experience. The physical world, the social—all change. We are only travelers in this world, who should use it as though we used it not.

2. *Divine grace constantly pursuing us* and abundantly bestowed upon us. It assumes various forms. There are ordinary graces acting upon us uninterruptedly; and there are sudden, unusual graces. The year just past was filled with graces for us.

3. *The great day of eternity.* The journey of our present life will have an end, which will be eternal happiness or misery. The saints always kept this thought before their minds and despised the passing world.

III. We will confess that we have derived but little profit from the annual beginning of a new year. We will ask for the grace to judge the world at its real value.

We will resolve:

1. To detach our heart from the passing world;
2. During the coming year to profit by the graces that God will bestow upon us;
3. To think often of eternity.

Man is like to vanity; his days pass away like a shadow.

ADORATION

Let us adore our Lord submitting in his human nature to the laws and vicissitudes of time. His life had a beginning and, like ours, was composed of days and years. After thirty-three years of labor and fatigue, he willed to undergo the common lot of human existence, ending his earthly pilgrimage by death. *It behoved him in all things to be made like to his brethren.*¹ Let us contemplate the adorable events of his life. Born a little infant, he grew up to full manhood by imperceptible progress. Although possessing all the treasures of knowledge from the very beginning of his life, he acquired little by little the experience of external things. He knew joy and sorrow, rest and labor. In a word, he lived a human life like ours. At all times he is equally beautiful, worthy of love and adoration.

¹ HEB., 2¹⁷

Let us thank him for having taught us by his example how to profit by the use of our time and for having merited for us the grace to do so. From the first instant of his life there was not a single moment but was most holily employed. *I do always the things that please him.*¹

Let us ask him to teach us the value of time and to make us realize our duty of employing it according to God's most holy will.

CONSIDERATIONS

At the sight of the years beginning, passing quickly by, and coming to an end one after the other, swallowed up in the mysterious abyss of the past, our thoughts turn to three considerations: the figure of the passing years, divine grace pursuing us constantly, and the great day of God that is approaching.

1. *The figure of the passing world.* The apostle Paul said: *The figure of this world passeth away.*² Every day's experience shows the truth of these words, more and more strikingly as the years of our life flit by and vanish. There is nothing changeless on the

¹ JOHN, 8²⁹ ² I COR., 7³¹

face of the earth. The world is a theater with continually shifting scenes, like a series of pictures endlessly following one another. One moment they attract our attention, then disappear; others take their place and these too disappear in their turn.

The law of change is universal. In the physical world it is a most essential condition of life. It is equally true of the moral world. Political societies are subject to perpetual variations in their boundaries, institutions, forms of government. The same is found in families and individuals. Everything changes, passes away. Like a swift stream whose waters rush ahead without anything being able to check their course. Like the deceptive mirage of the desert, the objects that we pursue escape us and, like a dream, disappear just when we think we have grasped them.

It is then, as St. Paul says, true that *here we have no permanent city*¹ and that *we are pilgrims and strangers on the earth*.² The route that we follow leads us now through smiling landscapes, now through barren and severe ones, but always urged by some invisible impulse. But it would be great folly for the traveler to be-

¹ HEB., 13¹⁴

² HEB., 11¹³

come enamored of the objects he meets with on the way. Would it be less unreasonable for us to fix our aim on the passing things of the present life? Our heart was not made for these. Like the Israelites crossing the desert, we too have a promised land as the goal of our journey.

Hence St. Paul advised the Christians of his day *to use this world, as if they used it not*,¹ that is without attaching their hearts to it, considering this world as a land that we must traverse in order to reach our final destination.

2. *Divine grace constantly pursuing us.* But one thing remains constant, pursuing us wherever we may be, never abandoning us—it is the grace of God. *Thy mercy will follow me all the days of my life.*²

Grace, the precious fruit of the redemption, is bestowed upon us most abundantly. To gain admission into our souls and overcome our resistance, it assumes various forms and speaks in many different accents. Now it addresses our mind, now our heart. It is some sight that moves us, a word that attracts or alarms us, a secret unction that silently penetrates our soul. There are ordinary graces

¹ I COR., 7³¹ ² PS., 22⁶

acting upon us uninterruptedly—the divine Master standing without and seeking admission to our heart. *Behold, I stand at the door and knock.*¹ Or they may be extraordinary, like flashes of lightning; such was the grace that converted St. Paul.

Often, indeed, we neglect or refuse to heed these divine solicitations. Nevertheless God, in his boundless mercy, continues to call us. His goodness and patience are so much greater than our stubbornness.

One year of our life has come to an end. Every day, every hour has been marked by some new grace, to inspire us with the desire for a more perfect life. The thought of the past year should fill us with gratitude to God for his great mercies, sorrow for our own infidelity, and a desire to follow these divine invitations more faithfully in the future.

3. *The great day of eternity.* The journey of our present life will not last forever. Each passing year is a milestone marking our progress and bringing us nearer the end of our journey. That end is not annihilation but eternity, another life that will not be composed of days and years but will be an immutable

¹ APOC., 3²⁰

state, eternally and irrevocably fixed. If we have lived well upon earth, it will be a state of surpassing bliss in which the possession of the supreme goodness will satisfy every craving of the soul for happiness. But it will be a state of wretchedness, despair, and futile regret if we have abused the gifts of time and grace. It will be the great day of God, a day of retribution and justice when each will receive punishment or reward according to his works, the day of revelation, for the supreme wisdom and goodness of Providence in the government of the world will be made manifest.

The saints, amid the changing vicissitudes of life, always kept before their mind the thought of that day, both terrible and consoling. From that thought they derived their contempt for the passing world, strength and patience in their trials, courage to overcome themselves and practice those virtues that are rewarded in eternity.

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Up to the present what spiritual profit have I derived from the annual beginning of a new year? Have I made any practical, generous resolutions? The frivolous world sees in this

event only an occasion for festivity and amusement. Has it not been so with me also?

My God, by thy grace, cure this blindness. Grant that I may view the world in its true light and judge its real value, that I may understand the grandeur of the hopes I entertain and the glorious heritage which is reserved for thy saints. *What is the hope of his calling, and what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.*¹

Turn my eyes from the vanities that surround me and make me walk in the way that leads to life. As years pass away and eternity approaches, grant that I may daily grow more faithful to thy grace, better prepared for thy visit.

I resolve:

1. To detach my heart from the passing world;
2. During the present year to profit by the graces that God bestows upon me;
3. To think often of eternity.

*Man is like to vanity; his days pass away like a shadow.*²

¹ EPHES., 1¹⁸

² PS., 143⁴

XI

THE THOUGHT OF ETERNITY

SUMMARY

I. We will view the lot of creatures whose existence is subject to the changes of time and the unchanging repose of God's eternal blessedness. We will adore this plenitude of being which God possesses.

II. We will consider that

1. *God sees everything in eternity.* It is from that point of view he judges everything. By this same supernatural standard we should value all things: the goods of this world, our duties, our passions.

2. *God refers everything to eternity.* Eternity is the term of God's inner life. The same is the end of the natural and the supernatural order. It is our duty to make eternity the end of all our endeavors.

3. *God permits all in the thought of his eternity.* He sees the evil in the world; and he is patient because he has all eternity. We will not be perturbed by political and social disorders nor by the trials of the Church, nor by our own crosses.

III. We will revive our belief in eternity. We will ask God to make this thought have a real influence upon our conduct.

We will resolve to judge all things from eternity's point of view.

For we know that if our earthly house of this habitation be dissolved, that we have a building of God, a house not made with hands eternal in heaven.

ADORATION

These years that pass so quickly, this rolling by of time that nothing can stop, that past which is no more, this present scarcely existing, that future which does not yet exist and which perhaps will never exist for us—all these forms of time, recalled by the beginning of the year, lead us to the thought of eternity.

Eternity is the measure of God's life, as time is the measure of the life of creatures. It is the immovable center about which all else turns, the end to which all must finally come, the last word of the future. Let us glance at this double view; first, of creatures, whose existence is subject to all the changes of time, appearing for a moment on the world's stage, to disappear the next; then of God in the unchanging repose of his eternal blessedness, embracing all time in his infinite existence, contemplating the ceaseless movements of passing creatures without being himself subject to change. *They shall perish, but thou remainest; and all of them shall grow old like a*

*garment: and as a vesture thou shalt change them, and they shall be changed. But thou art always the self-same, and thy years shall not fail.*¹

Let us adore this fulness of being which God possesses. Let us acknowledge that he alone is eternal, immutable. With the blessed apostle, let us praise the immortal king of eternity, whose reign had no beginning and will have no end. *To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever.*²

CONSIDERATIONS

Our life should be an image of God's eternal life. Let us consider that God sees everything, judges everything, and permits everything from the point of view of eternity.

1. *God sees everything in eternity.* It is in relation to eternity that he judges and values all things. The same should be the rule of our judgments. *Annos æternos in mente habui.*³ Let us consider everything from this supernatural point of view; for this will be to judge everything according to the truth. Amidst the darkness that surrounds us and often obscures

¹ Ps., 101²⁷⁻²⁸

² I TIM., 1¹⁷

³ Ps., 66⁶

our view, eternity is like a light-house, always shining and sending forth a bright light for those who do not turn away their eyes.

To know what idea we should have of this world and its values, what use we should make of it; to find out what duties we have to perform; to remove the prejudices and errors that arise from our passions: let us turn to this beacon and judge things by its light. We must ask ourselves how God values them from his eternal point of view, and how we ourselves will judge them when, freed from the bonds of mortality and the laws of time, we will see everything from eternity's point of view.

It is because the saints followed this rule that they thought and lived so differently from other men. Whereas the latter think, reason, and act in a worldly sphere, the saints, guided by the light of faith, passed beyond this finite world and formed their judgment of things face to face with eternity.

2. *God refers everything to eternity.* Eternity is the term of those acts which constitute God's inner life. Likewise the works that he accomplishes in time are related to eternity. We know that in the natural order of creation the supreme end is to lead souls to eternal rest

which God has given them to know and desire. In the mind of God the material world is entirely subordinated to this end. When he sent his Son on earth to redeem and sanctify us, it was our eternal glorification in Christ that he had in view. So, whatever God does in the order of creation and of grace has its reason and explanation only in eternity.

Since such is the law which God follows in the government of the world, the same ought also to be the rule of our life. For eternity God created us. Time and the things of time are a mere passing incident, a journey we must make to reach that goal. It depends upon our own free will to determine the eternal state of happiness or misery that awaits us. It is our duty, therefore, not only to work for eternity, but to set it before us as the sole end of all our endeavors. Whatever is not related thereto is vain and useless. And we should regard as wasted any period of time in which we set before ourselves any other end.

3. *God permits all in the thought of his eternity.* He perceives all the evil in the world, and he tolerates it. He hears the blasphemies of the impious, and he is silent. He permits his Church to be humbled and persecuted, his

friends to be despised, his saints to be forsaken, while his enemies triumph in honor. He waits to replace the reign of wickedness by that of justice until the day and hour determined by his eternal wisdom. He is patient in time because he has all eternity for retribution.

We are astounded and at times saddened and almost scandalized to see human passions run riot without hindrance, to behold human power in the hands of evil men. And we would be tempted to repeat the words of the psalmist: *My feet were almost moved; my steps had well nigh slipt. Because I was jealous of the wicked, seeing the prosperity of sinners.*¹ But we are not sufficiently imbued with the thought of eternity.

We will not, then, be perturbed by political revolutions or public calamities or the storms that threaten the Church. We ought to suffer without complaint those trials which we will have to undergo during life, the injuries and injustice. Being made for eternity, we will remember that all these evils can last only for a time. In the great day of eternity, the Church will appear glorious and triumphant and God's faithful servants will be rewarded

¹ Ps., 72²⁻³

a hundred fold for the sufferings they have endured out of love for him.

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

We believe in eternity. We know that it will come at the close of this present life. How does it happen that, knowing this important truth, we think of it so seldom and take so little account of it in the government of our life? We have not a practical appreciation of it. We believe in eternity. But must we not acknowledge that our belief exercises only a feeble influence over our judgments and our conduct?

My God, do not permit me to continue in such neglect. At the beginning of this new year, impress the thought of eternity upon my mind that it may henceforth be the rule of my judgment, the aim of my efforts, the foundation of my hope. Grant me the grace to see everything in the light of eternity, to refer everything to the standard of eternity, and to endure all suffering in the confident hope of eternity.

I resolve to judge all things from eternity's point of view.

For we know that if our earthly house of this habitation be dissolved, that we have a building of God, a house not made with hands eternal in heaven.¹

¹ II COR., 5¹

XII

THE PRIEST, A WITNESS TO ETERNITY

SUMMARY

I. We will recall that our dispositions at the beginning of a new year ought to be loftier than those of other men. We will adore the divine Majesty in his immutable eternity. We will also reflect upon the impression produced in the soul of Christ by the thought of eternity.

II. We will consider that a priest is a witness to eternity by his life, his preaching, and his ministry.

1. *By his life* a priest is a witness to eternity. His heart must be captivated neither by his native soil, nor family, nor temporal affairs. He must not be attached to anything on earth.

2. *By his preaching.* He is the herald of eternity. Beside the platforms where temporal affairs are discussed, the priest has his pulpit where he treats only of eternal interests.

3. *By his ministry* the priest is the ambassador of eternal interests. Every man has an occupation. That of the priest is the most sublime. At the altar, in the pulpit, in the confessional, he has only one end in view—eternity.

III. We will ask ourselves whether we are men of eternity, not only by our sacerdotal character and functions, but also by our thoughts and disposi-

tions. We will acknowledge that we are often occupied with worldly thoughts and interests.

We will resolve:

1. Never to forget that we are priests, witnesses to eternity;

2. To keep the thought of eternity in our mind especially in the exercise of the holy ministry.

Nostra conversatio in coelis est.

ADORATION

The beginning of a new year arouses in men's hearts very different feelings. In some it stirs up sad and tearful recollections. Others celebrate it with light-hearted joy. The greater part will take but little notice of it at all. We, however, consecrated to God, should bear in mind that we are witnesses to eternity. Such is the pregnant thought of today's meditation.

Let us adore the divine Majesty in the immutable repose of eternity. *They shall perish, but thou remainest: and all of them shall grow old like a garment: and as a vesture thou shalt change them, and they shall be changed. But thou art always the self-same, and thy years shall not fail.*¹ Let us recall that the great God of heaven, not being subjected to the suc-

¹ Ps., 101²⁷⁻²⁸

cessions and changes of time, sees everything in eternity.

Let us also adore the impression produced in the soul of Christ by the thought of eternity. Although his earthly life began in time like that of other men, he lived in eternity by his thoughts and aspirations. Was it not indeed to merit a blessed eternity for us that he was born, that he suffered, died, rose from the dead, and ascended into heaven? What was the object of his teaching if not to show us the way? And eternity is also the end for which he founded the Church, in which he continues to live. Let us honor this divine Master teaching his disciples and particularly his priests by his example how to live in the thought of eternity.

Faithful to these divine instructions, holy priests, like their Master, have always kept the perspective of eternity before their eyes. *While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen, are temporal; but the things which are not seen, are eternal.*¹ That is why they used the things of this world as though they used them not.

¹ II COR., 4¹⁸

CONSIDERATIONS

The priest is a witness to eternity by his life, his preaching, and his ministry.

1. *By his life* a priest is a witness to eternity. There are three roots by which a man is attached to the present life: his native soil, his family, and his temporal affairs. But nothing of this sort must captivate the heart of a priest.

Go forth out of thy country, said God to Abraham, *and from thy kindred, and out of thy father's house, and come into the land which I shall show thee. And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee.*¹ The same words are addressed to the priest. In worldly professions, to work in one's native place is ordinarily a favorable condition of success; quite otherwise for a priest. For him the gospel maxim is verified: *No prophet is accepted in his own country.*² The further he is removed, the more fruitful is his ministry. He loves his country and would sacrifice his life for it, if necessary. But his heart embraces the whole world. The love of country, so deeply rooted in the human breast, must not

¹ GEN., 12¹. ² LUKE, 4²⁴

keep him from seeking souls even to the utmost parts of the earth.

Secondly, every man feels the need of a domestic hearth about which will be grouped his own offspring on which he may concentrate all his affection. The priest voluntarily deprives himself of this joy. The austere law of celibacy which he has accepted forbids him the honor of fatherhood. He will pass his life alone, without any family except the souls entrusted to his care.

Lastly, the Church does not wish that he should devote himself to commerce or industry and so accumulate a fortune. In receiving tonsure, he took the Lord as the portion of his inheritance. He will have wherewith to be clothed and fed. That will satisfy him. *Having food, and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content.*¹

The priest's life is founded in eternity. By his state, his dress, and his manner of life, he recalls to men's minds the thought of eternity, he is a witness to eternity.

2. *By his teaching* he is the herald of eternity. On all sides are platforms where man tries to impart his own convictions to his

¹ I TIM., 6^s

fellowmen. Here the statesman discusses lofty questions of government. There the lawyer defends his client. From the academic platform the orator, neglecting the vulgar interests of politics and money, rises to the sublime regions of the ideal. In fine, there is the platform whence the teacher introduces his pupils to literary study and the secrets of science.

Beside these platforms the priest has his. But neither political questions nor legal rights nor scientific problems are discussed there. Eternal life is the subject of his discourse. It is to this sublime height that the priest summons his hearers. He invites them to meditate with him on the eternal unchanging truths of God, his attributes, his right to our adoration and love, the mysteries which he revealed and commands us to believe, the human conscience and its laws, the rewards and punishments of the next world. Such is the field of sacred eloquence. It is not our purpose to teach men how to succeed in their temporal affairs but to show them how to win eternal happiness by a Christian life. That is why sacred eloquence has a character that distinguishes it from all others. It is the word of God, an echo of eternity.

3. *By his ministry* the priest is the ambassador of eternal interests. Every man has some employment or occupation. The mechanic is found in his shop, the business man at his office, the physician beside the sick bed. The priest, too, has an occupation to which he must consecrate his life, a task infinitely glorious and superior to other occupations as heaven is above earth. For he is engaged in the interests of eternity, in God's interests. The sacrifice of the mass, the pulpit, the confessional, the administration of the sacraments, the visits to the sick, catechetical instruction, his charities, his studies, his daily practices of piety—what is the object of them all? Eternity. To rescue souls from hell and lead them to paradise is the motive that inspires all his works. For that was he consecrated to God in the priesthood. The temporal affairs of the world will interest him only so far as they are related to eternity. A priest who, unmindful of these lofty interests, becomes absorbed in worldly ambition, will be severely judged even by the world itself, which is so devoted to the concerns of the present life.

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

By virtue of my sacerdotal character and the holy functions entrusted to me, I am a witness to eternity. Am I equally so by my thoughts, judgments, and aspirations? Is there a great difference between my point of view and that of worldly people? Must I confess that I often act as though the interests of eternity were only of secondary importance in my life? Still, everything in my life reminds me of eternity. My daily mass recalls the eternal sacrifice of Christ in heaven; the recitation of the Breviary places me in communion with the saints in the eternal bliss; the sacraments that I administer have no other aim but to lead souls to that same reward; the truths that I preach are those of eternity. I ought to be able to say with St. Paul: *Nostra conversatio in coelis est.*¹

It is true, dear Lord, that I am often entirely occupied with worldly thoughts and interests. Enlighten my mind and touch my heart with thy grace. Make me realize that, if I must teach others to despise the passing vanities of this world and aspire to eternal happiness,

¹ PHILIP., 3²⁰

I must myself be profoundly impressed with these same dispositions.

I resolve:

1. Never to forget that I am a priest, a witness to eternity;

2. To keep the thought of eternity in my mind especially in the exercise of the holy ministry.

*Nostra conversatio in coelis est.*¹

¹ PHILIP. 3²⁰

XIII

EPIPHANY

SUMMARY

I. Let us adore our Lord's eagerness to make himself known. He reveals himself first to the shepherds, then to the magi, later to the apostles, and finally to the whole world. We will honor the magi as our precursors in the faith. We will thank our Lord for revealing himself to us more perfectly than to the rest of men.

II. We will follow the gospel narrative of the Epiphany.

1. *The star* and the grace that enlightened the magi. Overcoming all obstacles, they seek our Savior. So we, too, should seek him with courage to overcome all difficulties.

2. *The adoration* and the gift-offering of the magi. Likewise the soul that knows our Lord should offer him the gold of love, the incense of prayer, and the myrrh of penance.

3. *The return of the magi* to their own country to be the preachers and apostles of the Savior. In this we should imitate them since we are called to the priesthood. The seminary is another Bethlehem. Later on we will make him known to the souls of men.

III. We will ask ourselves how we have coöperated with God's grace in studying our Lord, in conse-

crating ourselves to him, and in preaching him to the world. We will ask our Lord to supply what is lacking in us.

We will resolve:

1. To thank God for having called us to the light of faith;

2. Every day to cultivate within us the spirit of zeal, by the aid of God's grace.

They offered him gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

ADORATION

Let us adore Christ in the eagerness with which he calls men to share in the blessings of his coming. *Christus apparuit nobis; venite, adoremus.*¹ No sooner is he born than he makes himself known to the shepherds, who are invited by God's angels to offer their homage to the new-born King. Soon the magi, from the Gentiles, follow and adore in Christ the promised Messiah.

Later on our Lord will reveal his divine mission to the apostles and will invite them to follow him. Lastly the entire world, instructed by the apostolic preaching, will see the darkness of their idolatry dispelled and will submit to the law of Christ. And thus the manifestation

¹ INVIT. OF EPIPH.

made to the magi will continue to the end of the world; for the Church is the continuation and development of Epiphany. This mystery will be consummated in heaven where the Word incarnate will be revealed to the elect in all the splendor of his glory.

The manifestation of the incarnate Son of God takes place during this life in different degrees. All Christians know Christ, but many only in an imperfect, obscure, and superficial manner as though from afar. How we should thank our Lord for commissioning us to be for men's souls what the star was for the magi, for the privilege of knowing him more perfectly than the rest of men.

CONSIDERATIONS

Let us follow the gospel narrative.

1. *The star* that miraculously appeared in the east. While the magi behold this heavenly prodigy, an interior grace makes its meaning known to them and inspires in them a desire to see and know this new-born King whose birth is thus revealed to them. Overcoming all obstacles, they set out on their memorable journey. It was long and was

performed not without great fatigue. But nothing could discourage them. God sustained their courage and rewarded their constancy by the happiness of finding the infant Savior whom they sought from afar. This conduct of the magi teaches us what the Christian soul must do if it would come to the knowledge of Christ.

When we were initiated in the faith, Christ revealed himself to us, but only obscurely. He appeared, so to speak, from afar, as if in a cloud, like the star announcing the Savior's birth to the magi without showing him to them.

But this first manifestation can not suffice for us. Our Savior desires to reveal himself to us more completely. He wishes us, like the magi, to seek him by every means in our power. *In the streets and the broadways I will seek him whom my soul loveth.*¹

To fathom the secrets of human science, men of study passionately devote themselves to long and difficult researches. Should we not be as eager for the knowledge of Christ as they are for the knowledge of things far less important? Let us seek Christ in study,

¹ CANT., 3²

meditation, and prayer. Let us ask him to make himself known to us.

2. *The adoration of the magi.* Having reached the end of their journey, the magi adore the infant Savior and offer him their gifts. *Falling down, they adored him: and opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*¹ These words express the duties of those who know Christ.

When our Lord has deigned to admit a soul to the intimate knowledge of his adorable person, that soul feels the most ardent and tender love for him, the need of offering itself entirely to him. It wishes to be joined to him by a most intimate union and dependence, to belong absolutely to him, consecrating to him not only its external possessions but its whole being.

It adores him as the King of ages, the great God to whom is due all the homage of heaven and earth. This adoration is typified by the gold which the magi offered the infant Savior.

The incense that rises towards heaven in fragrant clouds is, in the Scriptures, the symbol of prayer ascending from our hearts towards God to draw down his graces. *Let*

¹ MATT., 2¹¹

*my prayer, says the psalmist, be directed as incense in thy sight.*¹ And in the Apocalypse we read: *The smoke of the incense of the prayers of the saints ascended up before God, from the hand of the angel.*²

The Christian soul offers incense to Christ when, knowing him to be the source of grace, the source of light, strength, and help, it prays to him with humility, fervor, and confidence. This act is, in the spiritual order, what breathing is in the natural order, a necessary condition of life.

To crown its duties to Christ, the Christian soul offers him the gift of myrrh, that is professing to share in his spirit of sacrifice, to die to this world so as to live in him, to practice penance, to walk in his footsteps, carrying the cross. Only on this condition can we be called disciples of the crucified Savior.

3. *The return of the magi.* After performing their pious duty, they returned. *They went back another way into their country.*³ This was not from indifference on their part. They would gladly have passed the rest of their life near this King whom they had sought from afar.

¹ PS., 140² ² APOC., 8⁴ ³ MATT., 2¹²

But they had to deny themselves this comfort to accomplish another duty. Not for themselves alone had they been called to the crib of Bethlehem. According to the designs of Providence, they were to be preachers and apostles of this mystery. They had to testify their devotion to the Savior by making him known rather than by dwelling near him at Bethlehem. Tradition tells us that they devoted themselves to spreading the news of God's mercy in their own country, thus preparing the way for the preaching of the gospel.

In this last respect the magi are especially worthy of our imitation, for we have been called to Christ's apostolate. If we keep this mission before our minds, we will more faithfully prepare for it. The exercises of the seminary have only one object in view—to make us apostles of Christ. They give us a profound knowledge of his adorable person and help us to grow in his love so that we may be able to make others know and love him.

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Epiphany brings us the grace to seek Christ, to consecrate ourselves to him by adoration,

prayer, and sacrifice, and to preach him to the world. How have I coöperated with this grace?

Have I been diligent in studying Christ, profiting by the means provided here in such abundance? Is my life a journey undertaken to find the Christ?

Do I offer him the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, adoring him as my King, invoking him as my Savior, imitating him as my model? And is it my ambition to win souls to Christ? Does the fire of zeal burn in my heart?

My Jesus, supply what is lacking in me by the grace of thy Epiphany.

I resolve:

1. To thank God for having called me to the light of faith;

2. Every day to cultivate within me the spirit of zeal, by the aid of God's grace.

They offered him gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh.¹

¹ MATT., 2¹¹

XIV

STUDYING CHRIST

SUMMARY

I. We will adore our Lord desiring to be known by all men. He revealed himself to the shepherds and the magi, and later on to all the people by his preaching and miracles. He continues this revelation by the Church, the Scriptures, and the liturgy. We will honor these saints who have known our Lord best.

II. We will consider why we should try to know Christ.

1. *The worthiness of this study.* We see that it surpasses all other subjects, whether we consider our Savior himself and his life, or the influence that he exercised in the world.

2. *Our name of Christian.* Christ is our head, our Master, our Mediator. He is the principle, the means, and the end of the theological virtues. To know Christ is a science indispensable for eternal life.

3. *Our priestly vocation.* All the acts and duties of a priest refer to our Lord. If we know him but imperfectly, how can we fulfil our mission?

III. We will thank our Lord for having supplied us with abundant means of knowing him. We will acknowledge that we would have made greater

progress in knowing him, if we had the fidelity and perseverance of the magi.

We will resolve to repeat with all sincerity the words of St. Augustine: *Noverim te, Domine.*

ADORATION

Let us adore our Lord desiring to be known by all men. At his birth he calls the shepherds and the magi to his crib and makes known to them the mystery of his divine nature. During the three years of his public life, he manifested himself to the people by preaching and miracles. Finally he founded the Church, which will always be a shining revelation of his mysteries and teaching, of his adorable perfections and his right to our adoration, gratitude and love. He is also known by means of the Scriptures and the liturgy which reproduces his life; and by the teaching here in the seminary, which has Christ as its principal object. Especially in the silence of prayer does he make himself known to those who seek him, admitting them to the most intimate knowledge of his exterior and interior life.

Let us honor this divine knowledge communicated so abundantly to his mother Mary, to St. Joseph, guardian of his infancy and

witness of his life at Nazareth, to the blessed apostle John, to St. Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, and to so many other saints. Let us thank him for his goodness and mercy.

CONSIDERATIONS

To correspond with the grace of Epiphany, let us consider the reasons why we should apply ourselves to the study of Christ.

1. *The worthiness of this study.* Out of love for truth many devote themselves to long and laborious researches so as to enlarge the sphere of their knowledge. Should I not be equally diligent in the study of Christ? What science is more deserving of my attention than that of the incarnate Word? What is nobler, more beautiful, more divine? If we survey heaven and earth, the world of nature and the world of grace, the splendors of creation or the supernatural beauty of the angels and saints, we will find nothing equally worthy of being known. After the ineffable mystery of the Trinity, there is no object of study of such supreme concern.

If I consider the sacred person of Christ, what do I find? The Word of God with his

infinite perfections, the majesty of his divine nature, that Word existing before all time, by whom everything was made; and at the same time human nature elevated to the highest possible degree of perfection—a mind illumined by the most sublime light and endowed with the clear vision of God, a will ever holy and just, a soul enriched with the treasures of grace and, in particular, the singular privilege of the hypostatic union.

No one has ever exerted in the world an influence comparable to the Savior's. The annals of history record the illustrious deeds of great men. But their greatness and glory is as nothing when placed beside the God-man, whom the Church addresses in these words: *Tu solus Sanctus, tu solus Altissimus*. His name fills all time. Even before he appeared, the prophets had announced his coming, had described his character and his life, had foretold his mission. He is still, after nineteen centuries, the object of a love that no other love on earth has ever equalled. Is he not worthy of our study?

2. *Our name of Christian.* As a Christian I am intimately united to Christ. He is the head of that mystical body of which I am a

member, the divine type that I am pledged to reproduce, the master whom I must obey, the source of that grace which is the supernatural life of my soul, the Mediator through whom alone I can attain salvation, the ark of the New Testament in which God reveals himself to me, to be the object of my love and adoration.

Omnia habemus in Christo, says St. Ambrose; *omnia nobis est Christus*.¹ It is in him and by him we must believe, hope, and love. For he is the principle, means and end of these three fundamental acts of the Christian life as also of all other supernatural acts within our power. Hence, for a Christian, the duty of knowing Christ.

To be numbered in the flock of this divine Shepherd, we must know him. *I know mine*, he says, *and mine know me*.² Otherwise how can we believe in him, be devoted to him, love and adore him, pray to him, follow his example.

I can be ignorant of all else, provided I know Christ. That is true science, that is a science indispensable for eternal life. *This is life everlasting; that they may know thee, the*

¹ *De Virg.*, 16 ² JOHN, 10¹⁴

*only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.*¹

3. *Our priestly vocation.* Priests not only must be united with Christ, like the rest of Christians, they must be his preachers and apostles. Their whole ministry, all the duties of their priestly life have one object—to bring about the birth of Christ in men's souls and to make him known to them. In the pulpit, in the sacred tribunal, beside the sick, are we not preaching Christ? How perfect, then, should be our knowledge of this divine Master.

If the priest knows Christ only in a vague and exterior manner; if Christ is as a stranger to him; if he has seen the Master only from a distance; if the Savior has not been the object of long and attentive study; how will the priest be able to impart this knowledge to others? *To comprehend with all the saints, what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth; to know also the charity of Christ, which surpasseth knowledge, that you may be filled unto all the fulness of God.*²

¹ JOHN, 17³

² EPHES., 3^{18, 19}

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Christ has supplied me with abundant means of knowing him. In the seminary everything is a reminder of him—books, teaching, exhortations. The magi had only a star to guide them. By faithfully following that, they came to the knowledge of Christ as was indicated by their mystical gifts. With the more abundant helps at my disposal, I would have made greater progress in knowing Christ, had I their fidelity and perseverance. Why am I so little concerned about this one science without which all others will be useless?

My Savior, cure such blindness and indifference. May I have thee always before my mind in my studies, my reading, and my meditations.

I resolve to repeat with all sincerity the words of St. Augustine: *Noverim te, Domine.*

XV

THE HOLY NAME

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore the august Trinity choosing the name of Jesus. We will adore our Lord taking upon himself all the obligations signified by it. We will honor the archangel Gabriel bringing it to the earth, Mary and Joseph who gave this name to the infant Savior.
- II. We will consider the meaning of the holy name, the person designated by it, and its power.
 1. *Its meaning.* It belongs only to God, since he alone can perform what it signifies. We should regard it as even more holy and venerable than that of Jehovah. It expresses a work of redemption and sanctification.
 2. *The person designated.* Like every name it is identified with him who bears it. It is a memorial of the holiest life ever passed on earth. Our Lord justified its meaning to the fullest extent.
 3. *Its power* is analogous to that possessed by the liturgical formulas of the Church. Our Lord has promised to grant whatever is asked in his name. By its power the apostles and other saints have wrought great miracles.
- III. We will ask ourselves whether we have sufficient respect for and confidence in our Lord's holy name.

We will resolve frequently to invoke this divine name by way of pious ejaculation.

There is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved.

ADORATION

Let us adore the august Trinity choosing the name of Jesus to designate the incarnate Word. Let us also adore our divine Lord receiving this name and taking upon himself all the obligations that it signified, and most faithfully fulfilling them. Let us honor the dispositions which this name inspired in the archangel Gabriel when he came as the divine messenger of the Annunciation, in Mary and Joseph when they gave this name to the infant Savior, and in all those who never pronounce it but with respect and joy; lastly, in the Church, which surrounds this holy name with so many marks of honor.

Let us endeavor to cultivate these sentiments of respect that it justly receives both in Heaven and on earth.

CONSIDERATIONS

Let us consider the name of Jesus in the idea that it signifies, the person it designates, and the power it possesses.

1. *The meaning of the holy name* is one belonging only to God, since he alone can perform what it signifies. It is the most august and appealing name that God could take.

When God wished to establish his worship among the Jewish people, he made himself known to them by the name of Jehovah, that is, the plenitude of being, the author of all that exists. He is the Creator of the world and consequently the absolute Master of life and death, the sovereign Lord to whom all belongs and whom all must obey. The name of Jehovah expressed greatness, majesty, power. We know what fear and respect the ancient people had for that venerable name. It was regarded as so holy that no human lips were considered pure enough to pronounce it.

But the name of our blessed Lord, which has replaced that of Jehovah, should be still more holy and venerable. It means Savior. Of all the attributes expressing what God is to us, none is greater or more worthy of our respect and love.

It presupposed that of Creator; for only he who created can redeem. Only the Maker can reform the work of his own hands. More-

over, this name expresses that divine work by which the creature, purified from his sin, is once more reconciled to God. It also tells us how we, raised to the supernatural order, participate in the life of God himself, and are, as it were, deified. *God hath given him a name which is above every name.*¹

2. *The person designated by the holy name.* This name recalls the life and mysteries of the incarnate Word, him whom we call our Savior. In fact it is not salvation in the abstract that this name expresses, but salvation brought to the world by our divine Lord.

A name is always identified in some fashion with him who bears it. It designates him during life; after his death it is a reminder of his actions. In a name, therefore, are reflected the qualities of the person to whom it was given, the nobility of his birth, the splendor of his genius, the magnitude of his accomplishments, the holiness of his life. That is why we honor the names of the saints.

What, then, should be our veneration for this holy name, borne, not by a mere man, but by God, a memorial of the holiest life ever passed on earth and a witness to the love

¹ PHILIP. 2°

of God for man! Generally the meaning of his name bears no relation to a man's life. What glorious and pious names are borne by those of obscure and even wicked lives!

Not so however, with the name of our divine Lord. He justified its meaning most fully. As St. Bernard says, our Savior bore *not an empty title, without reality. His is not the shadow of a great name, but its full truth.*¹ The incarnate Word was really the Savior. It was precisely to save us he came and lived on earth, preached his heavenly doctrine, worked his miracles, and established his Church.

This holy name is deserving of our profound veneration. Justly does the Church decree religious worship in its honor. We ought to revere that name as we do our Lord himself; to love it as we love him.

3. *The power of the holy name.* The liturgy of the Church attaches a secret power to certain venerable formulas. When pronounced by her consecrated minister, the words of absolution remit sin and produce grace in the soul of the penitent; exorcisms drive out devils; her blessings sanctify the objects to which

¹ SERM. *de Circum.*

they are applied; to certain invocations are attached special indulgences.

It seems that the incarnate Word, adopting the sacred name as the symbol of his mission, placed in it certain treasures of grace. *Amen, amen I say to you: if you ask the Father any thing in my name, he will give it you.*¹ Such is the sacred promise made by our Lord. To know how it has been fulfilled and to be convinced of its power, let us consult the sacred Scriptures and the annals of the Church. With this name the apostles worked astonishing miracles, cured the sick, cast out devils, even raised the dead. One day Peter and John were entering the Temple to pray. At the gate a lame beggar asked them for alms. *Peter said to him: Silver and gold I have none: but what I have I give to thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise, and walk.*²

This power of our Lord's holy name was so famous in the early Church that even the pagans at times tried by its power to work the miracles which they saw performed by the apostles and their disciples.

In the succeeding ages what miracles were wrought by that name! How often, when

¹ JOHN, 16²³

² ACTS, 3⁶

pronounced with vivid faith, it has cured the sick and cast out devils! And how many miracles, still more wonderful, it has worked in the secret depths of the soul! There especially our Lord is pleased that its power should be manifested because it is particularly there that he acts as Savior. How many temptations have been overcome by the invocation of this holy name, how many heavenly favors have been received, how many virtues strengthened!

The saints constantly repeated it in their hearts and often with their lips, remembering the words of the Master: *If you ask the Father anything in my name, he will give it you.* Let us imitate their example.

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

*O Lord our God, how admirable is thy name in the whole earth!*¹ says the psalmist. And St. Paul says: *In the name of Jesus every knee should bow.*² My Savior, why is thy divine name, pronounced with such profound reverence by the angels in heaven, so little known and understood by the majority of mankind;

¹ Ps., 8² ² PHILIP., 2¹⁰

nay more, why is it even scorned and hated by many?

To be sure, I do not take part in this wicked blindness. Thou hast taught me the sacredness of thy holy name, and from my earliest years I learned to honor and invoke it. But have I all the love and veneration for it that I should?

Grant me the grace to feel that respect which holy Church expresses in her prayer: *Make us have, O Lord, a perpetual fear and love for thy holy name*; that it may be for me a source of light, strength, and consolation.

I resolve frequently to invoke this divine name by way of pious ejaculation.

*There is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved.*¹

¹ ACTS, 4¹²

XVI

THE HISTORY OF THE HOLY NAME

SUMMARY

- I. We will adore the incarnate Word taking a name according to the language of men. We will enter into the spirit of this feast which holy mother Church has established in honor of the holy name.
- II. We will consider the holy name in relation to the mysteries of our Lord's life.

1. *The joyful mysteries.* The archangel Gabriel announced this name to Mary. Our Lord joyfully received it, understanding its full significance.

2. *The sorrowful mysteries.* On Calvary our Lord consummated the mysterious meaning of his name. It was written on his cross. It is especially by his passion that he is our Savior.

3. *The glorious mysteries.* In heaven the majesty of this name is perfectly realized. Our Lord wishes his holy name to share in his eternal glory.

- III. We will recall that by our vocation we are destined to make this holy name known and invoked. We will ask ourselves whether we are filled with a profound reverence for it.

We will resolve frequently to invoke this divine name by way of pious ejaculation.

There is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved.

ADORATION

Let us adore the incarnate Word coming on earth, living our life, and taking a name according to the language of men. *Wherefore it behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren.*¹ The name given him from all eternity by God the Father, no human tongue dared to utter. *Holy and terrible is his name.*² On earth he is called Jesus, the blessed name by which he will always be known to our love, our praises, our adoration.

The Church, ever mindful to honor whatever relates to his divine person, has not neglected the worship of this divine name. She repeats it often in the liturgy and venerates it by outward marks of reverence. She has also established a feast in its special honor and this office is one of the most beautiful of the whole year. Therein we are taught that it is the joy of heaven, the terror of hell, and the consolation of the Church. With such thoughts, then, let us celebrate this feast.

Jesus! the very thought of thee
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far thy face to see,
And in thy presence rest.

¹HEB., 2¹⁷ ² PS., 110⁹

Nor voice can sing, nor heart can frame,
Nor can the memory find
A sweeter sound than that blest name,
O Savior of mankind!¹

CONSIDERATIONS

The mysteries of our Lord's life are popularly divided into three groups, joyous, sorrowful, and glorious. Let us consider his holy name in relation to these mysteries.

1. *The joyful mysteries.* At Nazareth the history of that adorable name began. There the archangel Gabriel announced to Mary: *Thou shalt bring forth a son: and thou shalt call his name Jesus.*² This name was given to him at Bethlehem, the place of his birth. *His name was called Jesus, which was called by the angel, before he was conceived in the womb.*³ On this occasion what must have transpired in the heart of the infant Savior when the divine name was bestowed upon him?

He fully understood the obligations which that name would impose upon him. He accepted them. Others had borne that name,

¹ Hymn of the feast

² LUKE, 1³¹

³ LUKE, 2²¹

but without realizing its import. But he would be the Savior both in name and in fact. He took this name with a joy that outshone the sufferings of the sacrifice that it implied.

This divine joy had first flooded his soul at the time of his incarnation. It was renewed when he received his holy name and thus inaugurated his mission of redemption. This is the thought expressed by the psalmist who, after declaring that he has taken God for his portion, adds: *Therefore my heart hath been glad, and my tongue hath rejoiced.*¹

2. *The sorrowful mysteries.* Our Lord has passed through the years of his public life, preached his gospel, and worked his miracles as testimonials of his divine mission. The moment has come for him to fulfill the engagement that he made, that his name recalls, the moment to show himself truly our Savior. He received that name in joy, but he must perform its obligations in suffering. He undergoes the agony in the Garden and the ignominy of the pretorium. His cross is raised on Calvary. And that we might understand how all the details of this cruel immolation are but a sort of actual commentary on his name,

¹ Ps., 15⁹

it is written above his head on the cross:
*Jesus Nazareus Rex Judaeorum.*¹

At the outset of his life he had accepted the mission of Savior. He undergoes all its dolorous conditions with a courage inspired by love. During the hours of his passion he constantly renews his acceptance of that sacrifice. *He was offered because it was his own will.*²

We have often followed the details of our Lord's immolation. There is no subject of meditation more familiar to us, none more consoling and profitable. Let us consider it again the light of his holy name. For this name, recalling the rôle of Savior which our Lord took upon himself, reveals to us the motive and the meaning of his divine passion. Let us adore each of those sufferings, the realization of his sacred name.

3. *The glorious mysteries.* The suffering and ignominy of the passion were followed by triumph and glory. *We see Jesus for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor.*³ He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven where he sits at the right hand of his Father and where his rule over the world will have no end. But he possesses this incom-

¹ JOHN, 19¹⁹

² IS., 53⁷

³ HEB., 2⁹

parable glory because he so perfectly carried out, during his earthly pilgrimage, the signification of his holy name. So he wishes this name to share in his glory, that it also should be eternal, glorious, and triumphant. *For which cause God also hath exalted him, and hath given him a name which is above every name: that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth.*¹

In his glory he receives the homage of all creatures who acknowledge him as their king. In heaven the angels and saints adore him. On earth the Church is equally eager to honor him and to acknowledge the blessings she has received from him. He wishes his name to share in all these praises and adorations.

Christ said to his apostles: *All power is given to me in heaven and on earth.*² From this heavenly throne he sends forth his grace to the souls of men and leads them on in the way of holiness. He overcomes the devil and defends his Church. Now, his blessed name is the depository of this power which he is pleased to manifest when it is invoked through that holy name.

¹ PHILIP., 2⁹⁻¹⁰

² MATT., 28¹⁸

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

The name of Jesus, considered in its history, is a striking memorial of his joyous, sorrowful, and glorious mysteries, by which our redemption was accomplished.

By my vocation I am called to make it known, to teach others to honor, love, and invoke it. Must I not myself be filled with a profound reverence for that name, an ardent love, a lively confidence? For me, dear Lord, devotion to thy holy name will be inseparable from my devotion to thy sacred humanity. May the invocation of thy name be always a source of light, strength, and consolation.

I resolve frequently to invoke this divine name by way of pious ejaculation.

*There is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved.*¹

¹ ACTS, 4¹²

XVII

I AM THE WAY

SUMMARY

I. We will adore God, as the ideal of perfection that we must try to realize in ourselves. We will thank our Lord for making this sublime rule of life visible in his own person. In him we can study the divine ideal reduced to the proportions of a human life.

II. The Savior is our way:

1. *By his teaching.* The gospel is the most complete code of perfection. Even the enemies of religion praise the moral teaching of our Lord. Every virtue, every duty of a perfect life is there set forth.

2. *By his example.* His life, both interior and exterior, is a beautiful model. His holy soul accepted the will of God as its only rule. But our life must be modeled after his.

3. *By his inspirations.* Like one teaching a child to write, our Lord, present in us, moves and directs our spiritual powers. He lives in us. The secret inspirations that we sometimes feel are the evidence of his presence.

III. We will ask ourselves whether we have always followed our Savior as our only way. We will acknowledge that we have often followed other paths.

We will resolve:

1. To study the life and teaching of Christ with still greater attention;
2. Frequently to examine our conscience as to our conformity with Christ.

I am the Way.

ADORATION

Let us adore God, as our last end and also the only way by which we can attain to the end. Not only is he the supreme Good that we seek, the possession of which will completely gratify all the desires of our soul, but he is also the type and ideal of perfection that we must try to realize in ourselves. *Be thou therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect.*¹

But it is not enough that we have a holy rule of life to imitate. It must be placed within the reach of all men; it must come down from heaven to earth; it must appear in a form accessible to our weakness and, while still remaining divine, become human; it must become visible and palpable; it must be made flesh.

This blessing has been accorded to us in Jesus Christ, in whom, under the veil of our

¹ MATT., 5⁴⁸

humanity, God reveals his holiness and all his perfections to us. In him we can study the divine ideal reduced to the proportions of a human life which each of us should reproduce in himself. *I am the way*, he says. In fact, he is the only way that can lead us to God.

Let us offer to the Savior our adoration and love. Let us thank him for subjecting himself to the exigencies of human life in order to become our way. And let us ask the grace to always follow in this way.

CONSIDERATIONS

In a threefold manner we may consider the Savior as our way.

1. *He is our way by the teachings of the gospel.* The heavenly doctrine which is taught in the gospel contains both those dogmatic truths that we must believe and the rule of life that we must follow. Nowhere will we find a code of perfection more sublime and complete. Even the enemies of religion are forced to admire the holiness and purity of its maxims. In their pride they refuse to admit the truth of the miracles recorded in the gospel, or at least the miraculous character of

those prodigies. But they admire the beauty and purity of its moral teaching and acknowledge that it surpasses all other systems and that anyone who follows its teaching would certainly attain the highest degree of perfection possible to man.

Every duty of a perfect life is there set forth: humility, placing itself in the lowest place, concealing the good that it does so that the left hand knows not the good deeds of the right; mildness that is kind to all, that represses anger and does not wound another by even the slightest word; patience that does not complain, if we have been wronged; charity, that pardons and even loves its enemies, returning good for evil; self-denial, even to the voluntary relinquishment of all one possesses; purity, even of look and thought. To crown all, there is the virtue of religion that seeks God and his justice in preference to everything else, prompting us to accept his holy will as the rule of our own, to adore him as the author of all good, and to betake ourselves confidently to him as to a father in all our trials and necessities.

2. *He is our way by his example.* St. Luke says in the book of the Acts: *The former*

*treatise I made of all things which Jesus began to do and to teach.*¹ He is both the Master whose teaching we accept and the model whom we must imitate. We have studied the life of our Lord and often meditated on it. We are acquainted with its external events and have even contemplated the dispositions of his soul, his interior life. Thus we see that his life is an imitable type of religious devotion, purity, humility, charity, and zeal; the purest and most beautiful expression of perfection; in a word, the model of holiness.

We find in our Lord none of those weaknesses which showed in the most illustrious saints the infirmity of human nature. Even those involuntary agitations and indeliberate movements of human passion are banished from his soul. He possesses a calm serenity that nothing can disturb, a self-control that never forgets itself, a complete subjection of the senses to the will, and of the will to God. To please God is the rule of his thoughts, judgments, and actions; so that he could truly say: *I do always the things that please him.*²

Let us remember that God has given us in his Son a model of perfection to be our guide.

¹ ACTS, 1¹ ² JOHN, 8²⁹

This divine King invites us to follow him. From the moment of his incarnation till his triumphant ascension into heaven, there is nothing in his life which does not offer us an object for imitation. He always had in mind that he was our model.

Our life ought to be copied after his. The apostle tells us that at the last day God will admit to the number of the elect only those in whom he perceives this resemblance of his divine Son.

3. *He is our way by the inspirations of his grace.* Our Lord is not satisfied with instructing us as our teacher, with conducting us as a magnanimous leader; he wishes also to dwell in our heart, to enlighten and inspire, to sustain and encourage.

One who is teaching a child how to write, after requisite theoretical instruction, after showing by his own example how it ought to be done, guides the child's hand, combining his own action with that of the child so as to produce the letters with greater firmness and precision. Likewise our Lord, present in us by his divine Spirit, takes possession of our powers and faculties, moves and directs them, acting with them so that they may more

surely and perfectly perform the works required of them.

*Because you are sons, God hath sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts,*¹ St. Paul tells us, *that Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts.*² And again: *And I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me.*³ Our Lord himself tells us the same thing when he says that, along with his heavenly Father, he will dwell in the souls of his faithful disciples. *We will come to him, and will make our abode with him.*⁴ And again he says: *He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit.*⁵

Those secret inspirations that we sometimes experience are the precious evidence of our Lord's presence in our soul. Christ living and acting in the Christian soul is the essential condition of every supernatural act. Very truly, then, he is our way.

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My God, the prophet asked thee to show him the way: *Make the way known to me wherein I should walk.*⁶ In our favor hast thou heard

¹ GAL., 4⁶

² EPHES., 3¹⁷

³ GAL., 2²⁰

⁴ JOHN, 14²³

⁵ JOHN, 15⁵

⁶ PS., 142⁸

this prayer, giving us thy Son as our way of salvation and perfection. *I am the way*, he says.

It is by following this divine way, by obeying his precepts, by imitating his example, by coöperating with his inspirations that the saints have passed through the dangers of spiritual life and reached the blessed goal of their aspirations.

Can I say, my Savior, that thou hast been my way, that I have thought, spoken, and acted like thee? How often I have followed other paths, refusing to follow thee? Hence the time lost on my journey, the countless daily faults and imperfections. Hence the distance that separates me from Christian and priestly perfection.

Help me by thy grace. Enlighten my mind, strengthen my will that I may never depart from the true way, which is thee, my Savior.

I resolve:

1. To study the life and teaching of Christ with still greater attention;
2. Frequently to examine my conscience as to my conformity with Christ.

*I am the way.*¹

¹ JOHN, 14⁶

XVIII

I AM THE TRUTH

SUMMARY

I. We will adore the Word of God, the source of truth. He came into the world as the witness to the truth. We will adore in Christ this divine truth made accessible to us.

II. We will consider our Lord as the object, the revealer, and the guarantee of our faith.

1. *Our Lord is the object of our faith.* In his person are summed up all the dogmas of Christian belief. He is the central thought and object of the science of theology.

2. *Our Lord is the revealer of our faith.* His words are the great source of Christian revelation. And he is the teacher of revelation by his entire life on earth.

3. *Our Lord is the guarantee of our faith.* His teaching is the infallible word of God, attested by his miracles. Because of his promise to safeguard the Church from error, we receive her teaching with unfaltering confidence.

III. We will acknowledge that we have never sufficiently understood that our Savior is the Truth and have not always followed the unerring light of his teaching.

We will resolve to have recourse to our Lord in our studies as well as in all our difficulties and doubts.

I am the Truth.

ADORATION

Let us adore the Word of God, the source of truth. From him radiates the light which illumines every intelligence in heaven and on earth. God sees in him, as in a flawless mirror, his own adorable being, his infinite perfections, the immensity of his powers. In him also God contemplates the exemplar of those countless worlds that he can create.

By his Word he has enlightened the darkness that surrounds us with some rays of that divine light. *The true light, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world.*¹ Especially in Christ we are called to enjoy that light. For he came into the world as the witness, interpreter, and preacher of truth. *The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth.*² *For this was I born, and for this came I into the world; that I should give testimony to the truth.*³ After having imbibed divine knowledge in the bosom of God, he revealed its secrets to us according to the measure that pleased divine Providence. *No man hath seen God at any time: the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father,*

¹ JOHN, 1⁹² JOHN, 1¹⁴³ JOHN, 18³⁷

*he hath declared him.*¹ And again: *All things whatsoever I have heard of my Father, I have made known to you.*² Accordingly he can say: *I am the truth.*³

Let us adore in Christ this divine truth, made visible and accessible to us. We will gratefully submit to his teaching, humbling our finite reason before the profound mysteries that he reveals. Let us thank him for condescending to be our teacher. *One is your Master, Christ.*⁴ Let us promise to be always faithful disciples.

CONSIDERATIONS

Let us consider that our Lord is the Truth in the order of faith for three reasons: he is the object, the revealer, and the guarantee of our faith.

1. *Our Lord is the object of our faith.* In his adorable person are summed up all the dogmas and mysteries of Christian belief. He is its center and epitome. The faith of the just of the Old Law consisted in believing in the Messiah who was to come. In the New Law the faith of the just consists in believing in the

¹ JOHN, 1¹⁸

² JOHN, 15¹⁵

³ JOHN, 14⁶

⁴ MATT., 23¹⁰

incarnate Word who came on earth to redeem us. *By this is the spirit of God known, says St. John. Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God.*¹ St. Paul declares even more explicitly: *Believe in the Lord Jesus: and thou shalt be saved.*²

No matter what tract of theology or what mystery of religion we consider, we find the divine Son of God an essential element, whether it be the creation or the last judgment, the beginning and progress of spiritual life in our souls on earth or its consummation in the next world, the authority of the Church or the sacraments that she administers, the salvation of the just or the damnation of the wicked. In every chapter of theology it is the divine Word that we are studying; in every spiritual exercise, it is the same divine Word that we are approaching.

2. *Our Lord is the revealer of our faith.* Was it not to reveal divine truths and to accomplish our salvation that he came on earth? Are not his words, whether contained in the holy gospels or handed down by tradition, the great source of Christian revelation?

By his teaching he draws aside the veil that

¹ I JOHN, 4⁴ ² ACTS, 16³¹

hides eternal supernatural truths from our eyes and he permits us to enjoy a partial glimpse of those truths, reserving the rest for the day of our eternal glory.

Not merely by his words is he the teacher of revelation but by his entire life on earth, manifesting to us by example as well as by precept the holy will of God. He often spoke of the evil of sin and the great worth of immortal souls; but were not his passion and death a still more eloquent revelation of those truths? All the mysteries of his life constitute a supreme revelation of God's love for man.

3. *Our Lord is the guarantee of our faith.* The evangelist tells us that *he was teaching them as one having power.*¹ The truths which he revealed to the apostles are not the conclusions of human reasoning nor are they based on the researches of human science. They are the direct words of Truth itself. Our Lord set upon his teachings the seal of divinity by the miracles that he wrought to attest their truth. It is God himself who speaks—the sure guarantee of our faith.

That his revelation might spread over the face of the earth, that all men might be saved,

¹ MATT., 7²⁹

he founded his Church and promised to safeguard it from error. It is, therefore, with unfaltering confidence that we receive her teaching; for he, the author of Truth, is with her. To her he has entrusted the deposit of faith, her bishops and priests he sends forth with a mission to spread the knowledge of that saving truth. *Going therefore teach ye all nations Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.*¹

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

The Creator not only has given us an intellect capable of understanding truth, but has also endowed it with a desire to contemplate the truth in all its fulness, a desire which this world can never satisfy. But I have never sufficiently understood that thou, my Savior, art that truth for which I was made, the possession of which in heaven will be my eternal happiness. Henceforth be thou my Teacher. *Let all teachers hold their peace, and all created things keep silence in thy presence; do thou alone speak to me.*²

¹ MATT., 28²⁰

² IMIT. I, 3²

Pardon me if, heretofore, I have been so inattentive to thy teaching and so careless in following it. What difficulties I would have avoided if, instead of depending upon the unaided guidance of my own reason, I had followed the unerring light of thy divine truth!

I resolve to have recourse to our Lord in my studies as well as in all my difficulties and doubts.

*I am the Truth.*¹

¹ JOHN, 14⁶

XIX

I AM THE LIFE

SUMMARY

I. We will adore in God the source of life and the fulness thereof. All other life is the finite outpouring of his plenitude. Through Christ our soul participates in the life of God.

II. We will seek to understand how our Lord is our life by considering three expressions used by him.

1. *I am the good Shepherd.* The life of the flock is sustained by the solicitude and watchfulness of the Shepherd. It is Christ who gives us the spiritual nourishment we need and defends our soul from every attack.

2. *I am the bread of life.* Our daily food repairs our weakened forces. So our Savior is the support of our spiritual life, especially in the Eucharist.

3. *I am the vine, you are the branches.* The life of God is communicated to Christ and through him to us on condition that we remain united to him.

III. We will see that, in order to participate in the life of Christ we should surrender ourselves entirely to him. We will confess that we are far from this perfection.

We will resolve:

1. Frequently to ask our Lord to give us his life;

2. To entertain a great love for mental prayer and holy communion, the sources of this life;

3. To act habitually in union with Christ.

O Jesu vivens in Maria, veni et vive in famulis tuis.

ADORATION

Let us adore in God the source of life and the fulness thereof. He lives not only in himself but in all creation. From him alone proceeds all life both in the vegetable and animal kingdoms, and in man to whom it gives the power of knowing and willing.

All these manifestations, in their endless variety, are the finite expression of God's life, the outpouring of his own eminent plenitude. This life is communicated more really and fully through our blessed Lord. *I am come that they may have life*, he said, *and may have it more abundantly*.¹ We are thereby elevated to a participation in the divine nature, receiving a new dignity, being, as it were, deified through that wonderful association with the second person of the most holy Trinity. This life of God diffused in the Church is manifested in the lives of her apostles and martyrs,

¹ JOHN, 10¹⁰

her host of saints, in her priesthood, religious orders, and her various works of charity.

Let us thank our Lord, the author of all these wonders, the source of the Church's life.

*I am the life.*¹

Let us ask him to make us understand the supreme value of that life which is the foundation of all holiness. Let us long for an increase of this life in our souls by the purity of our heart and the fervor of our prayers.

CONSIDERATIONS

We can explain how our Lord is our life by considering three expressions used by him.

1. *I am the good Shepherd.*² The life of the flock is sustained by the solicitude and watchfulness of the shepherd. He gives them nourishment to keep them alive and defends them from every attack.

Christ is our Shepherd. For he gives us the spiritual nourishment necessary to sustain the life of our soul. By him we are led to the divine pasture of the Church where the Holy Ghost gives the increase. *The Lord ruleth me: and I shall want nothing. He hath set me in a place of pasture.*³

¹ JOHN, 14⁶

² JOHN, 10¹⁴

³ PS., 22¹⁻²

What shepherd ever showed greater tenderness and vigilance for his flock? Under his guidance we have nothing to fear. He will point out the dangers we must avoid; his hand will raise us up after our falls and will cure our wounds; his consolation will relieve our sadness; his strength will sustain our courage. He is at our side in all our struggles; and, if we trust in him, nothing will disturb us. *I set the Lord always in my sight: for he is at my right hand, that I be not moved.*¹

2. *I am the bread of life.*² The shepherd protects the life of his flock but he does not give them life. Our daily bread, assimilated to our own body, communicates to us the vital power that it possesses and repairs our weakened forces; it is the means by which God sustains our life.

As bread supports our bodily life, so our Savior is the support of our spiritual life. He himself tells us. *I am the living bread which came down from heaven.*³ This is continually accomplished in a spiritual manner by prayer; but especially in the Eucharist, where our Lord literally fulfills what he promised—he is our food, our bread of life. *He that eateth*

¹ Ps., 15^s² JOHN, 6³³³ JOHN, 6⁴¹

*me, the same also shall live by me.*¹ *Sacrum convivium in quo futurae gloriae nobis pignus datur.*²

3. *I am the vine, you are the branches.*³ The life of the vine, the sap, spreads from the trunk to the branches. Separated from the trunk, the branches quickly dry up and die, for they have no longer the principle of life within them. They must remain united to the vine from which they draw the hidden power that gives them life and nourishes them.

Our Lord is all this to those who are united to him. We are the branches of that mystical vine. As in every vine there is only one sap that circulates throughout all the parts, adorning them with leaves and flowers, and lading them with fruit, so in Christ and in us there is only one spiritual life, the life of God, communicated to Christ and through him to each of us. The moment we cease to be united to Christ, the Christian life within us is destroyed, and we are reduced to the condition of the branch that no longer adheres to the vine. *If any one abide not in me: he shall be cast forth as a branch, and shall wither,*

¹ JOHN, 6⁵⁸

² *Office of the B. Sacrament.*

³ JOHN, 15⁵

*and they shall gather him up, and cast him into the fire, and he burneth.*¹

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

St. Paul calls the incarnation: *Magnum pietatis sacramentum*.² It spreads through the world of Christian souls by that assimilation by which Christ is united to them, making them members of his body and participants of his life. This eminent dignity conferred on us establishes a rule of conduct for us which we should constantly bear in mind.

Christ is the Shepherd watching over me, the nourishment of my soul, the principle that animates it—he is my life. I ought, therefore, to surrender myself entirely to him, follow his inspirations, and remove all obstacles to the influence of his life in my soul. Let us recall the words of St. Paul: *I live, now not I: but Christ liveth in me.*³

My Savior, may this ever be the object of all my efforts. But how far I am from this perfection! I still seek to gratify my senses, my caprices, my self-love. Come, establish thy kingdom in my heart.

¹ JOHN, 15⁶ ² I TIM., 3¹⁶ ³ GAL., 2²⁰

I resolve:

1. Frequently to ask our Lord to give me his life;

2. To entertain a great love for mental prayer and holy communion, the sources of his life;

3. To act habitually in union with Christ.

O Jesu vivens in Maria, veni et vive in famulis tuis.

XX

SICUT PARVULI

SUMMARY

- I. Let us adore our divine Master in his love for children. In the gospel, childhood is represented as the type of perfection.
- II. We will consider that we must become spiritually what children are in the order of nature. We must then practice:

1. *Detachment from inordinate desires.* Children are inaccessible to the allurements of ambition, wealth, and worldly pleasures. Like them the true Christian preserves a holy indifference towards the goods of this world.

2. *Detachment from pride.* The genuine disregard of self that we find in children, is what constitutes humility. *Love to be unknown and to be counted as nothing*, says the Imitation.

3. *Detachment from self-will.* Obedience is the peculiar virtue of childhood. It is the most difficult form of self-denial and the most meritorious. It is eminently necessary for priests.

- III. We will ask for the grace to understand and value these words of our Lord. *Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.* We will implore the intercession of the Blessed Virgin to obtain this grace for us.

We will resolve to cultivate the daily practice of the three virtues on which we are going to meditate.

Nisi efficiamini sicut parvuli, non intrabitis in regnum coelorum.

ADORATION

The most precious grace of Christmas for us is that of Christian childlike spirit, by which we become children in Christ.

In the gospel, childhood is represented as the type of perfection. During his mortal life our Lord showed how much he loved little children. He permitted them to approach him, he blessed them. And he even declared to his apostles that they are the models to be imitated: *Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*¹

Let us adore our divine Master in his love for children. May we, by imitating them, become worthy of the same love. That is the grace we seek in this meditation, from the divine child of Bethlehem.

¹ MATT., 18³

CONSIDERATIONS

Childhood is the symbol of the Christian life; we must become spiritually what children are in the order of nature. In fact, we can sum up the Christian life under the aspect of three forms of detachment: from inordinate desires, from pride, and from self-will. Let us consider these in little children.

1. *Detachment from inordinate desires.* Children's hearts are strangers to those numerous attachments that are for so many causes of agitation, worry, and sin. They are inaccessible to the longings of ambition, the allurements of wealth, or worldly pleasures. While all about them men are fretfully rushing from one enticement to another, they are peacefully indifferent to the evils of the present and the anxieties of the future. No corruption taints their innocence.

Like them true Christians pass through the world without becoming attached to it. They preserve a holy indifference; *they use this world, as if they used it not.*¹ If God bestows the goods of this world upon them, they are not any happier on that account; if he deprives them of

¹ I COR., 7³¹

these goods, they are not any the sadder. They have the spirit of holy Job: *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: as it hath pleased the Lord so is it done: blessed be the name of the Lord.*¹ Their hearts are sealed against the seductions of passion and the attractions of the world.

This is a blessed state of mind that, so far as is possible, gives us a paradise on earth, free from the griefs and vicissitudes which they experience who are devoted to this world. It is a disposition particularly favorable to union with God and the life of prayer.

2. *Detachment from pride*, that is humility. This is especially what our Lord himself had in mind when he exhorted his disciples to become as little children. In children we find that disregard of themselves which constitutes humility. Their place in human society is due to the interest inspired by their very weakness. No one consults their prudence; the affairs that concern them most vitally are decided without consulting their opinion. No account is taken of their views nor of their talk.

This is a model of true humility. *Love to be*

¹ JOB, 1²¹

unknown and to be counted as nothing, says the Imitation.¹ That is the favorite maxim of humility, its rule of life. If a humble man is obliged to manifest his wisdom and knowledge, to show his treasures of virtue and holiness, with which God's grace has enriched him, it is not for the purpose of shining before others and winning their esteem, but only for the glory of God and the edification of his neighbor.

This virtue leads us to accept without complaint, nay, even joyfully, the contempt and humiliations that God permits. The heroic practice of humility even seeks them as precious favors.

3. *Detachment from self-will*, that is obedience. It is the peculiar virtue of childhood, filling the place of all the other virtues. With an intellect just beginning to develop, without the practical knowledge of experience, incapable of deep reflection or foresight, it is necessary for a child to be directed by others, to submit his own will to the will of those placed over him by divine Providence. His greatest wisdom is obedience. In this, as in all else, Christ is our model. *He was subject to them*, says the evangelist.²

¹ IMIT. I, 2³

² LUKE, 2⁵¹

Every Christian should submit his own will to that of Christ. Of all the sacrifices we can offer to God, this is the most meritorious; for there is nothing harder for us to do, nothing that requires so high a degree of self-denial.

This virtue is eminently necessary for priests. On the day of their ordination the Church exacts of them an explicit promise of obedience. Is not that sufficient reason for us to cultivate it during our preparation for the priesthood? Let it be the great rule of our life, so that our years in the seminary may be summed up in the words that so briefly describe the childhood of our Lord: *He was subject to them.*¹

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

There are few indeed, my Savior, who understand and value those words which came from thy divine lips. *Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*² It is one of the mysteries which thou hast hidden from the proud ones of this world and hast made known to the humble. *Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them to*

¹ LUKE, 2⁵¹

² MATT., 18³

*little ones.*¹ After thy example, may I become detached from inordinate desires, from pride, from self-will.

Mary, mother of the incarnate Word, whose privilege it was to contemplate thy divine Son hour by hour during his whole childhood, obtain for me the grace to participate with you in those virtues and holy dispositions that filled his soul.

I resolve to cultivate the daily practice of the three virtues on which I have just meditated.

*Nisi efficiamini sicut parvuli, non intrabitis in regnum coelorum.*²

¹ MATT., 11²⁵

² MATT., 18³

XXI

THE HOLY FAMILY

SUMMARY

I. We will adore God preparing the way for the coming of his divine Son by special graces bestowed on Mary and Joseph. In spirit we will visit the humble abode of the holy family.

II. We will consider the charity, subordination, and mutual edification practiced in the holy family.

1. *Charity* was the very soul of the holy family. Hence their grief when Christ remained behind in Jerusalem. Their love towards one another made their home a paradise.

2. *Subordination to the head of the family*, and this notwithstanding St. Joseph's relative inferiority.

In the Seminary, as in every religious family, there is an authority acting in the name of God. The holy family should be our model.

3. *Mutual edification*. The holy family was a sanctuary of all the Christian virtues. Those thirty years of our Lord's hidden life teach us how we should spend our years in the seminary.

III. We will ask ourselves whether we have done all that is required of us to make the seminary a faithful copy of the holy family by practicing charity, respectful obedience, and mutual edification. We will pray to the holy family for the grace to imitate their virtues.

We will resolve to take the holy family as our model in correcting the faults of our seminary life.

St. Joseph, singularly beloved by Jesus and Mary, pray for us.

ADORATION

Let us adore God preparing the way for the coming of his divine Son into the world. Mary and Joseph were predestined to be the instruments of Providence in accomplishing this purpose. They were enriched with exceptional graces and divinely guided until the day when Christ growing up under their care, would accomplish the work of redemption.

Mary, who was to have a most intimate part in this divine work, was conceived without sin and passed the years of her childhood in the Temple.

The circumstances of St. Joseph's early life are unknown to us, but we can not doubt that he was an object of special predilection on the part of God.

Mary and Joseph were united in marriage; and into this family the Savior was to be born and to grow up.

Let us go in spirit to visit the humble abode of this holy family. The world does not know them. We will find there no signs of

worldly riches. The head of the family is a carpenter, earning each day's bread by the work of his hands. It may be they were sometimes in want. But they were rich in the gifts of grace and the consolations of the Holy Spirit. Their life was humble, modest; plain to all appearances; but their every act possessed incomparable value in the eyes of God.

CONSIDERATIONS

The conditions of a model family life are three: charity between its members, subordination to the head, and mutual edification. Let us consider these conditions in the holy family of Nazareth.

1. *Charity* was the very soul of the holy family. United to each other by the purest and most tender love, Joseph and Mary loved the infant Savior whom Providence had entrusted to their care. He was their joy and consolation; the whole world possessed no treasure to compare with this. With what happiness they saw him growing up in their midst! Whatever labor and fatigue this responsibility entailed was made easy by their love for him.

What words can express their grief when, by God's special design, he remained behind in Jerusalem on the occasion of one of their visits to the holy city? And when they found him, his mother said to him: *Son, why hast thou done so to us? Behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.*¹

And was not their love for this divine Son reciprocated a hundred fold? If he had loved all mankind so as to die for them, what must have been his love for these two who were so entirely devoted to him? Consequently in the holy family there was no division, no coldness to wound their hearts. Charity inspired their words, governed their mutual relations, and made a paradise out of that humble home of Nazareth.

This is the model for all Christian communities. What a blessing for those families united by such a love as reigned in the home of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph! All discord, all animosity is banished.

2. *Subordination to the head of the family.* From the point of view of dignity and personal qualities, St. Joseph occupies only the third place in the holy family. Notwithstanding

¹ LUKE, 2⁴⁸

this relative inferiority, it is to him that God gave the authority as head of the family. When it is necessary to flee into Egypt, St. Joseph is the one warned by God; likewise for the return to Palestine.

Such is the order of subordination established by God in the holy family. Mary, regardless of her incomparable personal privileges, is under the authority of Joseph. And the incarnate Son of God, the eternal Wisdom, obeys them both with exemplary docility. In fact, St. Luke records the whole life of Christ at Nazareth until thirty years years old, in these simple words: *He was subject to them.*¹

St. Augustine remarks that "although the entire world is subject to Christ, yet he was subject to his parents."² What makes this obedience still more remarkable is that it involves what we would consider as unbecoming the dignity of his divine Majesty. "The parents of the Savior," says St. Basil, "were pious and holy, but they were poor and had to procure the necessities of life by daily labor; Jesus showed his obedience by assisting them in their humble occupations."³

¹ LUKE, 2⁵¹ ² SERM. 6 *de Divers.*

³ *Constit. Mon.*, 4

Every religious family established in the Church has a rule and an authority to interpret and enforce it. The private wills of individuals no matter how great may be their wisdom, must conform to this double expression of the will of God.

In the seminary this practice of obedience to the rule is essential to our progress; and later on, in the priesthood, it will also be a condition of a fruitful ministry. The Church is a hierarchy, with one authority above another. Our place is that of the child Jesus at Nazareth. We must submit to the will of those who represent God and respect their authority.

3. *Mutual edification.* The holy family was a sanctuary of all the Christian virtues. Profound humility, complete detachment from the world, ardent charity, practical zeal for the salvation of souls—all these were the daily practice of the holy family.

Externally there was nothing striking or remarkable about their life. It was apparently the ordinary life of a poor family. With indifference men passed by the modest abode of Joseph, the carpenter. But in the eyes of God it contained treasures of grace more valuable than the whole world. Jesus, Mary

and Joseph lived there the life of heaven on earth. Every act of their will and aspiration of their heart glorified God more perfectly than all the works of the apostles, the blood of the martyrs, the penance and austerities of the saints.

Those thirty years of the hidden life of Christ in the company of Mary and Joseph teach us how we should spend our years in the seminary. The holy family is the model of our life here. Since we are one day to become representatives of that divine Master, should not our life here be one of mutual edification, like that in the home of Nazareth?

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

Let each of us ask himself whether he has done all that is required of him to make the seminary a faithful copy of the holy family by the practice of charity, respectful obedience, and mutual edification.

Have I real love for my brethren here? Or are there some towards whom I am cool and indifferent, whom I try to avoid at recreation time? Have I a spirit of bitterness and ill-will for some?

Have I a genuine respect for the rule and for

the orders and advice of my superiors? Am I careless in the matter of punctuality and in observing the prescribed silence? Do I attach but little importance to these and other rules of our community life? Is my conduct such as to encourage others in the practice of piety, regularity, charity, and obedience?

My God, grant that I may grow ever more faithful in imitating the virtues of that blessed family life at Nazareth, often praying to them for the grace to participate in their virtues.

I resolve to take the holy family as my model in correcting the faults of my life here in the seminary.

*St. Joseph, singularly beloved by Jesus and Mary, pray for us.*¹

¹ *Litany of St. Joseph*

XXII

SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY

THE LABORERS IN THE VINEYARD

SUMMARY

I. Let us adore God imposing the law of work upon all of us. He is the first to follow it in the work of creation; and his divine Son also submits to it. We will honor the saints as laborers in God's vineyard.

II. We will consider that a priest should possess the qualities of a faithful laborer.

1. *A faithful laborer does not choose his task.* Every man has a task given him by God. This special call from God is especially necessary in the priesthood. A good priest is indifferent as to the part of the vineyard assigned to him.

2. *A faithful laborer neglects nothing to perform his task well.* The priest should entirely devote all his time and his gifts of nature and grace to his Master's work.

3. *A faithful laborer does not keep the fruit of his labor for himself.* The eternal recompense promised him is the only reward he considers. He must work for God's glory, not for his own.

III. We will confess that we have not been as faithful in God's service as we should have been. We

will ask our Lord to make us devoted laborers in his vineyard.

We will resolve to perform our duties here in the seminary with that fidelity with which we hope some day to enter upon the work of our vocation.

Go you also into my vineyard.

ADORATION

In this householder who confides the care of his vineyard to hired laborers, let us recognize God imposing the law of work upon us all. As a man, as a Christian, above all as a priest, I am in God's vineyard, a glorious prerogative that I should regard as most honorable and precious.

God himself, emerging, so to speak, from his eternal repose, shows forth his power and wisdom in creating the world. Let us adore this divine worker, making the world from nothing by the power of his word. *He spoke and they were made: he commanded and they were created.*¹ And he adorned it with wonders and beauties that are but partly known to us.

Let us also adore the incarnate Word, sent on earth by his heavenly Father to submit to the law of labor. Sin had deformed the work

¹ Ps., 32^o

of the Creator. He came to reestablish order and harmony. To accomplish this task, he even pours forth the last drop of his blood. He could justly say to his Father: *I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now glorify thou me, O Father, with thyself.*¹

Let us honor the apostles and their successors who have continued the work of the Savior in the Church, martyrs, holy priests, and all the saints. They have labored with untiring zeal in the Lord's vineyard.

My God, thou hast called me to the same honor. I am to work for thee. Soon thou wilt say to me: *Go you also into my vineyard.*² These years are devoted to the preparation for that mission. Grant me the grace to profit by them as I should.

CONSIDERATIONS

Let us consider that a faithful laborer does not choose his task, he neglects nothing to do it well, and he does not keep any fruit of his work.

1. *A faithful laborer does not choose his task, but accepts what his master assigns to him.*

¹ JOHN, 17⁴ ² MATT., 20⁴

Whether it be easy or difficult, pleasing or disagreeable, conspicuous or obscure, he is satisfied. Without this spirit no great work can be accomplished.

Every man has his task to do in this world and for him that is God's work. It is the Master's privilege to assign the work; and he gives each one the necessary gifts. This special call from God is more urgently necessary in the priesthood than in any other walk of life. It must be more distinct and precise, we may say more authentic. To enter the priesthood without this call would be a sacrilegious intrusion. We would thereby bring down upon us malediction instead of God's blessing.

And in the priesthood itself there are various routes to pursue. Herein the call of God, manifested by legitimate superiors, assigns each one to his part of the work. This call will determine where each one is to exercise his zeal.

A good priest is genuinely indifferent whether his post be conspicuous or hidden from view, whether it suits his convenience or not, whether it will be filled with consolations or grief. With all that he is not concerned.

The Master says: *Go into my vineyard.* He goes, confident that God's blessing will accompany him. The spirit of obedience dictates his duty to him. It is enough. He will not complain nor will he be discouraged. Neither jealousy nor ambition will find entrance into his heart.

2. *A faithful laborer neglects nothing to perform his task well,* in a manner to satisfy his master. He is entirely devoted to his work: whereas the dishonest one does not hesitate to waste in idleness the time that should be devoted to work; when he does work, it is carelessly, without diligence or interest.

We work in God's vineyard. A task has been given us. That we may perform it well, God has bestowed upon us time and the gifts of nature and grace. They are the talents entrusted to our diligent care. He will require of us an exact account of the use we have made of them.

The value of time has often been pointed out to us. It belongs entirely to God. All the hours and minutes of which it is composed have their determined tasks. They should be devoted to that work which has been assigned us. If we otherwise use our time,

we are robbing God of the service which belongs to him. The time given us is short and, once passed, will never return. To realize its value, we should consider the good works with which we can fill it, especially those of study, piety, and virtue in the formation of our priestly character—works that God will reward by eternal glory in heaven.

God bestows on us other gifts of nature and grace to be employed in his service: our health, our intellect, all the powers of our soul, supernatural guidance and assistance. All belong to him. *Unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required.*¹ To fit us for the sublime task appointed unto us, he has enriched us most lavishly. When we become priests, we will have to use all that we have and all that we are in the service of the Church. Now is the time for us to learn this spirit of priestly devotion.

3. *A faithful laborer does not keep the fruit of his labor for himself.* He knows that it does not belong to him. He is conscientious in preventing any loss to his master; for he regards unfaithfulness in this matter not only as an act of injustice, but as an abuse of trust.

¹ LUKE, 12⁴⁸

The salary promised him is the only reward that he considers.

God, in sending us to work in his vineyard, promises us a magnificent recompense. *I am thy reward exceeding great,*¹ he said to Abraham. *I will give you what shall be just.*² If God bestows eternal glory on ordinary Christians who faithfully obey his law, what must be the reward of his faithful priests?

But to win this reward a priest must work for God, not for himself; he must seek God's glory, not his own; he must establish the kingdom of God in men's souls, not seek to win their esteem and devotion for himself and his own profit. *I will not give my glory to another,*³ he tells us in the words of the prophet.

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My God, thou hast chosen me to work in thy vineyard; thou hast assigned a glorious task to me. How am I preparing for that work? Am I indifferent as to what part of the vineyard is assigned to me? Is it only thy greater glory that I have in view? Is my devotion to the duty of study a pledge of future fidelity in the sacred ministry?

¹ GEN., 15¹

² MATT., 20⁴

³ IS., 42⁸

Thy grace, my Savior, has called me. Only thy grace can make me a devoted laborer in thy vineyard. *Da quod jubes, et jube quod vis.*

I resolve to perform my duties here in the seminary with that fidelity with which I hope some day to enter upon the work of my vocation in the Lord's vineyard.

*Go you also into my vineyard.*¹

¹ MATT., 20⁴

XXIII

SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY

THE WORD OF GOD

SUMMARY

I. We will adore the love and devotion which Christ had for the word of God. We will honor these same dispositions in the heart of Mary.

II. We will consider the word of God in itself, in its manifestation, and in its effects.

1. *The word of God considered in itself.* It is the expression of the inner life of God. Let us recognize the word of God in the sacred writings and in the teaching of the Church.

2. *Considered in its manifestation.* God sent his Word on earth to teach us. Christ himself has spoken the word of life to us and he still speaks. He is present among us both by the Eucharist and by his word.

3. *Considered in its effects.* It enlightens our mind. It has also an effect in the realm of morals, acting on our wills. It is liturgical and sacramental, producing grace.

III. We will thank our Lord for having sown the seed of his Word so profusely. We will ask ourselves whether we are the good soil of which the gospel speaks.

We will resolve to seek some particular profit for our soul in all our spiritual reading and in every sermon.

Christus docet: Audiamus, timeamus, faciamus.

ADORATION

Let us adore the love and devotion which Christ had for the word of God. It governed his thoughts and judgments. By the mouth of the psalmist he declares: *Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my paths.*¹ *Thy law is my meditation.*²

Let us honor these same dispositions in the heart of Mary. During her long sojourn in the Temple, with what delight she must have studied the law of God and listened to its explanation! Later on she received the word of God by the message of an angel with perfect submission: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to thy word.*³ In another place the evangelist tells us that *Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart.*⁴

Jesus and Mary not only heard the word of God; they put it into practice. Their life,

¹ PS., 118¹⁰⁵

² PS., 118⁷⁷

³ LUKE, 1³⁸

⁴ LUKE, 2¹⁹

both exterior and interior, was the fulfillment of that adorable word.

Let us ask of God that we may make his word the rule of our life.

CONSIDERATIONS

After the Holy Eucharist, which contains the body and blood of the Lord, there is nothing more venerable than the word of God. Let us consider it in itself, in its manifestation, and in its effects.

1. *The word of God considered in itself.* The inspired writer tells us: *Now what wisdom is, and what was her origin, I will declare: and I will not hide from you the mysteries of God.*¹ Like him let us try to understand what this word of God is in its origin. It is the very thought by which God knows himself, the expression of his inner life, the exercise of his infinite intelligence.

So far as may be possible, let us represent to our mind God in the silence of his eternity, separate from all creature, living in himself supremely perfect and happy. What is this life of God? He pronounces a word and

¹ WIS., 6²⁴

thereby is the Father of his only begotten Son, who is called his Word. This word uttered eternally, expresses all the divine perfections, power, wisdom, holiness; all that God knows, all that he commands, all his immutable laws.

This word, which is God himself, we are privileged to hear. The Scriptures, the teaching of the Church, and other spiritual books are the translation, imperfect though it be of that divine thought into human language.

Every word is the expression of a thought. The more august the thought, the more sublime the word which expresses it. How incomparable must be the word that expresses the thought of God!

2. *The word of God considered in its manifestation.* That he might speak more directly to us, God sent his Word to the earth to become man among us, so as to enable us to hear heavenly truths in our own human language. Christ the Savior was also the preacher of the heavenly doctrine of salvation. The sower of the seed in the parable is Christ. For three years he scattered the seed of his doctrine; and the multitudes followed him to hear his teaching.

According to the expression of the prophet: *The people that walk in darkness have seen a great light,*¹ for, henceforth the Son of God himself was to be our teacher, to enlighten us in those things which no one else could know. *No man hath seen God at any time: the only-begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.*²

The ancient people possessed only an imperfect revelation; but the Church knows it in its plenitude. Received by faithful witnesses and consigned to the inspired pages of Holy Writ and to tradition, it forms a priceless treasure which the Church guards with jealous care. This divine word assumes different forms; sometimes in holy books, in sermons, in the speculations of theology, in the elementary teaching of the catechism. But it is always the word of Christ.

3. *The word of God considered in its effects. The word of God is living and effectual,*³ says St. Paul. And Christ, speaking by the prophet, says: *My word . . . shall not return to me void.*⁴

Among men the communication of thoughts

¹ IS., 9² ² JOHN, 1¹⁸ ³ HEB., 4¹²

⁴ IS., 55¹¹

and feelings is an indispensable condition of human society. God, wishing to establish a society between himself and mankind, *that our fellowship may be with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ*,¹ founded it upon his word. This society consists in the manifestation of God and his truths to us, his commands, and the communication of his life to us. This threefold gift is brought about by means of his revealed word.

In the first place, his word is the résumé of those truths that God has made known to us by the teaching of the Church. It enlightens our mind and, by the action of the Holy Ghost, produces the act of faith.

Its second effect is in the realm of morals. For it is a sacred code of laws contained in the gospel, the writings of the apostles, and the canons of the Church, and in the maxims of perfection promulgated by Christ. It turns our will from evil, urges it to do good, leads it to the practice of Christian virtues, and elevates it, by conformity with God's will, to the height of most eminent holiness.

Its last effect is liturgical and sacramental, found in the venerable formulas employed

¹ I JOHN, 1³

by the Church in administering the sacraments, in exorcisms and blessings, and in other functions of the liturgy, whether composed by the Church herself or received directly from her divine founder. These formulas possess the efficacy of prayer to draw down God's grace and they also directly produce holiness as they are the vehicles communicating the divine life to our souls.

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My Savior, thou hast sown the seed of thy word profusely. Why, then, has it not brought forth more abundant fruit in our souls? The gospel parable gives us the reason. Some, like the trodden path where the seed was devoured by the birds, give no heed to the divine word because their attention is given to worldly preoccupations. Others heed for a while; but they are inconstant like the rocky soil where the seed dried up; they take good resolutions which they quickly forget. Others, compared to the soil where the thorns choked the growth of the seed, are attached to the riches and pleasures of life which stifle the good desires inspired by the word of God.

In my life are there such obstacles preventing

the good seed from producing fruits of holiness in my soul? By thy grace, O Lord, remove all hindrances. Grant that I may become that good soil which received the seed and brought forth fruit a hundred fold.

I resolve to seek some particular profit for my soul in all my spiritual reading and in every sermon I hear.

*Christus docet: audiamus, timeamus, faciamus.*¹

¹ ST. AUGUSTINE

XXIV

QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY

THE FORTY HOURS DEVOTION

SUMMARY

I. We will adore the grief of our Lord's heart because of the sins of the world. In the Garden of Olives he was sorrowful even unto death. He invites us to compassionate him. We will accept this invitation.

II. We will consider that the Forty Hours devotion offers us an opportunity for three duties towards our Lord.

1. *Reparation.* We should desire to repair the offense offered to God by sin. It was one of the motives of Christ's passion and death. He wishes especially those admitted to his sanctuary to join with him in this act of reparation.

2. *Prayer.* We should not detest sinners; we will pray for them. This duty is especially fitting during the Forty Hours devotion. We will pray for the enemies of religion, and particularly for those sinners who are bound to us by special ties of blood or of friendship.

3. *Thanksgiving.* We have been preserved from the corruption of the world and placed among the number of God's servants. This is due entirely to his mercy. We will offer him our sincere gratitude.

III. We will regret having sometimes longed for the pleasures of the world and not properly appreciated the joy of belonging to God.

We will resolve to increase our acts of reparation and thanksgiving, and our prayers for sinners.

Between the porch and the altar the priests, the Lord's ministers shall weep, and shall say: Spare, O Lord, spare thy people.

ADORATION

Let us adore the grief of our Lord's heart because of the sins of the world. The evangelists set before us a most touching scene in his agony in the Garden. They show us the Savior prostrate on the ground, crushed by such a piercing sorrow that a bloody sweat pours from his body. *My soul is sorrowful even unto death.*¹ It was the sight of our sins, with which he was burdened, more than the perspective of his passion that caused this suffering.

He invites us to compassionate him. For this purpose the Church has instituted the devotion of the Forty Hours. The world is full of joy and dissipation. But our Lord says to his apostles: *You shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice.*²

¹ MATT., 26³⁸

² JOHN, 16²⁰

Let us accept this invitation and console his wounded heart before the tabernacle. There we will find his friends gathered together. We should seek to pass the Forty Hours in close union with Christ.

CONSIDERATIONS

The Forty Hours devotion offers us an opportunity for three duties towards our Lord; reparation, prayer and thanksgiving.

1. *Reparation.* We are distressed by the offense which sin offers to God. Reparation is a religious act by which we seek, so far as lies in our power, to make amends for this offense by increasing the adoration he receives, presenting ourselves to him as victims for sin. We do this out of love for God and his honor. It is a meritorious act that unites us with our Lord making the great reparation for sin on the cross.

Although Christ died on the cross to save us, yet a still higher purpose sustained him in all his sufferings, the glory of his heavenly Father. His death on the cross was above all a sacrifice; and the chief end of sacrifice is God's glory.

Christ, then, wished to make reparation for

the offense of sin against God. And he continues to do so in heaven and in the tabernacle. He invites us to join with him in this act of infinite reparation. It is particularly the duty of those who are admitted to God's sanctuary. And this motive should inspire us in all our devotions. The Church has established the Forty Hours devotion especially for this purpose.

Let us consider the countless sins by which men outrage God's divine majesty: the impiety, blasphemy, and sacrilege of the wicked; the indifference of those who live as if there were no God; the negligence of even pious Christians in performing their devotions; our own sins and those of our brethren. To repair so many offenses, we will adore and bless our Lord, adding some practice of penance and expiation.

2. *Prayer.* At the foot of the altar we will be mindful of sinners, not to detest them, but to arouse within us a compassion for their deplorable blindness. When we will be priests, this disposition will inspire us to lead back to God those who have strayed away. At present we can manifest our zeal by earnest prayer for them. In behalf of sinners, we will im-

plore God to enlighten them by his grace and move their hearts that they may return to him.

This thought is most fitting during the time of the Forty Hours. After the glory of God, the conversion of sinners should be the object of our prayers before the Blessed Sacrament during these days of grace.

We view with indignation the numerous attempts of the enemies of the Church to destroy religion in the hearts of her children. But, in the spirit of charity, we should ask God to counteract their plots and to renew in the hearts of the persecutors the miracle of Saul who, after being an enemy, became a zealous apostle.

On all sides there are souls in whom the faith is dead, who are living at enmity with God in the habitual state of sin. It is the privilege of God's priests to be his instruments in rekindling their faith and fidelity. Let us pray God to fructify their zealous efforts.

In the number of these poor sinners who are Christians only in name, are there not some bound to us by special ties of friendship, perhaps even members of our own family? Is it necessary for us to be reminded that

they should be foremost in our prayers for the conversion of sinners?

3. *Thanksgiving.* I have been preserved from the general corruption of the world and I find myself in the number of God's servants called not merely to shun sin but to devote myself to combating it. Among the many victims of corruption, indifference, and impiety, for whom we implore God's mercy, are there not some of my former companions? If I have escaped these evils, it is due solely to the goodness of God.

How much reason I have to thank our Blessed Lord when I compare my situation here in the seminary with that of men in the world; when I consider the troubles, anxieties, and many preoccupations of their life and, on the other hand, the calm and peace that reign in our community! Here spiritual blessings are showered upon us in prodigal abundance. The scandals and bad examples that surround them, often leading them into sin, are unknown here. Blessed be thou, my Savior for all thou hast done for me. My life-long devotion in thy service will be small return for thy mercies; but it is the best I have to offer.

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

How have I heretofore fulfilled these duties of reparation, prayer, and thanksgiving? Do I try to make some amends for the pleasure-seeking forgetfulness and wickedness of the world by practicing penance and reparation?

Have I thought to thank God again and again for the blessing of a vocation to his holy priesthood, remembering that it is entirely due to his mercy and nowise merited by me? Have I sometimes regarded with wistful longing the mad follies and exciting pleasures of the world in preference to the solitude, silence, and life of piety in the seminary? Have I regretted the sacrifice of these grosser enjoyments for the pure and holy delight of living with God? Have I imitated the prodigal son who *would fain have filled his belly with the husks the swine did eat*?¹

Grant, my Savior, by thy grace, that I may find more joy in the society of thy friends before the tabernacle than by tasting the sinful pleasures of the world. Give me the spirit of the royal psalmist, who said: *For better is one day in thy courts above thousands.*²

¹ LUKE, 15¹⁶

² Ps., 83¹¹

I resolve to increase my acts of reparation and thanksgiving, and my prayers for sinners.

Between the porch and the altar the priests, the Lord's ministers, shall weep, and shall say: Spare, O Lord, spare thy people.¹

¹ JOEL, 2¹⁷

XXV

CHRISTIAN SADNESS

SUMMARY

I. We will adore our Lord warning his apostles: *You shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice.* We will contemplate him weeping over Jerusalem, and his bitter sadness in the Garden of Olives.

II. We will consider three forms of Christian sadness.

1. *The sadness of exile.* The royal psalmist bemoans the length of his exile in this world. St. Paul longs for the dissolution of his body. But the worldly-minded do not understand this grief.

2. *The sadness of zeal.* Every priestly heart is sad at the thought of the multitudes that do not think of their eternal salvation. They neither know God nor love him. In our day the resources of evil are multiplied beyond measure.

3. *The sadness of conscience.* We grieve for our past offenses and our continued daily faults that result from the strife between good and evil within us.

III. We will ask ourselves whether we have not avoided thinking of these evils and whether we have not too often devoted ourselves to enjoyment and self-indulgence. We will ask our Lord to correct these faults.

We will resolve to moderate all excessive tendencies to worldly pleasures.

You shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice.

ADORATION

Let us adore our Lord warning his apostles: *You shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice.*¹

The night before he died, his sadness was so great that the evangelist describes him as *being in agony*.² The violence of his grief made a bloody sweat pour from his body and wrung from him that cry of desolation: *My soul is sorrowful even unto death*.³

He wept over Jerusalem and its inhabitants, foreseeing the punishment they would draw down upon themselves by the frightful crime they were about to commit.

What sadness must have pierced his heart on the occasion of Peter's denial, the treason of Judas, the flight of his apostles, the thought of his precious blood poured forth without avail for so many souls.

Let us contemplate the bitter sorrows of his blessed Mother, the repentant tears of Mary Magdalen, and of St. Peter, converted by a

¹ JOHN, 16²⁰

² LUKE, 22⁴³

³ MATT., 26³⁸

look of his divine Master; and the constant grief of St. Paul because of the loss of souls.

CONSIDERATIONS

Let us consider three forms of Christian sadness.

1. *The sadness of exile.* *Woe is me*, says the psalmist, *that my sojourning is prolonged.*¹ How often it is the sincere longing of the human soul! St. Paul had *a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ.*² *O, most bright day of eternity!* says the Imitation.³

In fact the earth is not the land of our desires. *For we have not here a lasting city.*⁴ It is a journey we are making and its end is heaven. Whoever seeks to gratify the desires of his heart by the goods of this world, will find only bitterness and disappointment. Hence the unrest all over the face of the earth, which the Church calls a *vale of tears*, for every life has its trials and pains. But it is so in a special manner for the friends of God who, seeing the vanity of earthly pleasures and considering the unalloyed blessing of eter-

¹ PS., 119⁵ ² PHILIP., 1²³ ³ IMIT. III, 48¹

⁴ HEB., 13¹⁴

nal happiness, lead a life of exile. Their looks are turned towards heaven; and they consider the prolongation of their exile merely as an opportunity to increase their merits.

The worldly-minded do not understand their spirit. They foolishly hope to find their happiness on earth. In pursuing the seductive attractions of earthly pleasures, they are like travelers deceived by the mirage in the desert. But those enlightened by God's Holy Spirit are not misled by these illusions. They sigh for heaven where they will see God and be happy in his presence, like exiles longing to return to their native land.

2. *The sadness of zeal.* For a priest there is only one thing worthy of esteem, and that is the salvation of souls; only one thing to dread, and that is sin. Yet so many have little or no thought of their salvation. On every side there is sin, flooding the world and carrying immortal souls to their eternal ruin—souls created to enjoy God in heaven.

How many are born, live, and die without even knowing God? Where are the souls that love God, moved to gratitude by his countless blessings, understanding that in him alone the human heart can find rest; souls that

live only for him? There are some, it is true. But they are few in comparison with the multitude of the indifferent, of those whose affection is centered in things of earth, and of those who do not know that even the best there is in the world is only a pale reflection of God's beauty and goodness.

We see God and his interests outraged, insulted, blasphemed, despised. Some men, urged on by a diabolical spirit, rise up against God and wage war upon him. In our days the resources of evil are multiplied beyond measure. Are we not saddened by the thought of so many souls rushing to their everlasting perdition despite the redeeming sacrifice of Christ, despite the efforts of zealous priests to rescue them?

3. *The sadness of conscience.* We can find just cause for grief if only we penetrate our own heart and examine our conscience.

If I take a glance over the past, I see numberless faults, some, perhaps, even grievous. Have I made reparation for them by penance? When I consider how little I have done by way of expiation, have I not reason to believe that I have a heavy debt to satisfy before God's justice?

In spite of good resolutions I repeatedly fall into the same sins and the same neglect. Evil inclinations within me constantly expose me to the danger of offending God. *Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*¹ said St. Paul.

My soul is a scene of strife between good and evil. And the good is not always victorious. The ideal of perfection attracts me, but my efforts are not in proportion. I wish to love God whole-heartedly, but so many other attachments hold me captive. I lack the courage needed for generous self-sacrifice. If my life is free from great evil, it is equally without great virtues. Should I not bemoan my lack of correspondence with God's grace and my little progress in the way of holiness?

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

The author of the Imitation says: *Through levity of heart and neglect of our defects we feel not the sorrows of the soul; and we often vainly laugh, when in all reason we should weep.*² Is it not true that I purposely avoid thinking of those evils which would sadden me? Have I

¹ ROM., 7²⁴ ² IMIT. I., 21²

not been too eager for the joys and gratifications of the present life and too little moved by its evils?

I loathe the guilty pleasures to which the evil-minded devote themselves. But, although I avoid such excesses, do I not unduly give my time to useless amusements? My business in the world is to rescue souls from sin. Do not enjoyment and self-indulgence occupy too large a place in the life of one whose vocation is so grave and serious?

My Savior, I need thy grace to correct my light-mindedness. I do not ask that worldly sadness which would make me a burden to myself and to others, of which the sacred writer says: *Sadness hath killed many, and there is no profit in it;*¹ but the sadness of the saints which is a participation in that which thou didst feel in the Garden of Olives.

I resolve to moderate all excessive tendencies to worldly pleasures.

*You shall lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice.*²

¹ ECCLUS., 30²⁵

² JOHN, 16²⁰

XXVI

ASH WEDNESDAY

SUMMARY

I. We will adore God pronouncing sentence of death upon Adam after the fall. We will adore our Lord offering himself as the expiatory victim for sin. We will also adore the Holy Ghost giving the Church the grace of repentance in a special degree at the beginning of Lent.

II. We will consider three kinds of death.

1. *The death of the soul by sin.* Divine charity, our true life, which makes the soul capable of performing meritorious acts, is destroyed by mortal sin. Our first thought on receiving the ashes to-day should be one of repentance.

2. *The death of the body.* *Thou shalt die the death* is a law imposed on all mankind. The thought that we must die is most salutary in exhorting us to shun evil and do good. It shows us the folly of becoming attached to the goods of this world.

3. *Death to the life of the senses.* To establish the reign of grace in our souls, we must die to the life of nature. Without mortification and self-denial we can not participate in the life of Christ.

III. We will ask our Lord to impress the thought of death upon our mind. We will confess that we have often taken part in the ceremony of Ash

Wednesday without reflecting on the lesson it teaches.

We will resolve:

1. To have the thought of death frequently before us;

2. To begin Lent with a sincere determination to practice some special mortification as penance for our sins.

Remember, man, that thou art dust, and into dust thou shalt return.

ADORATION

Let us adore God uttering these memorable words to Adam after the fall, words which the Church places on the lips of her priests today: *Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.*¹ Thus he humbled the pride of man who wished to make himself equal to God. His is the universal right of life and death. In punishing sin with such severity, he displays his justice and holiness. Let us accept this divine sentence with fear and respect. We acknowledge that death is the just punishment of sin.

Let us adore our blessed Lord, offering himself as the expiatory victim for sin. Although he was holy and innocent, he under-

¹ GEN., 3¹⁹

goes the penalty of sinners. All during Lent we will keep before our minds the thought of Christ on the cross, our model of penance.

Let us adore the Holy Ghost giving the Church at the beginning of this holy season the grace of repentance in a special degree. He wishes us to become soldiers of the cross. That is why the Church, by placing ashes on our forehead, recalls to our mind the salutary thought of the state to which we will be reduced in the tomb. Let us ask God to make us profit by this lesson.

God calls us all to the holy practice of penance, desiring us to become humble and contrite of heart. In the words of the prophets: *We have sinned, we have done unjustly.*¹ *In a contrite heart and humble spirit let us be accepted.*²

CONSIDERATIONS

The principal thought suggested by to-day's ceremony is that of death. Ashes are the result of destruction by fire. And the words pronounced by the priest emphasize this meaning still more precisely. Let us consider three kinds of death which the imposition of the ashes recalls.

¹ JUDITH, 7¹⁹ ² DAN., 3³⁹

1. *The death of the soul by sin.* The life of the soul is divine charity, by which the Holy Spirit animates and sanctifies the soul and makes it fruitful. Under its influence the soul acquires an indescribable beauty that makes it pleasing to God. It is then capable of performing meritorious acts and possesses the germ of eternal life which is the development and the plenitude of grace.

Venial sin alters and enfeebles this life. Mortal sin completely destroys it, cutting off the soul from the divine source of its life and depriving it of all its beauty. It paralyzes the soul, making it incapable of any act deserving heavenly reward, and leaving therein a fatal germ that will become its eternal reprobation. Thus can we say that sin is the death of the soul, a death more to be dreaded than that of the body.

When receiving the ashes, our first thought should be one of repentance at the recollection of the spiritual death which we have perhaps often incurred by grievous sin. The royal prophet, even after God had forgiven his sin, says: *My sin is always before me.*¹ Let us likewise deplore the misfortune we have had of offending God.

¹ Ps., 50⁵

2. *The death of the body.* In what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death,¹ said God in solemn warning to our first parent. All mankind has been subject to this sentence. And some day we shall have to submit to it. After some years, whether few or many, we too will die. Life is a journey terminated by death. Every hour advances us farther on the journey. *Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.* Although this is a dread thought, yet it is a salutary one, guiding us through life and eloquently exhorting our will to shun evil and do good.

I have to die; what folly then to attach myself to the goods of the present life which I will soon be obliged to leave; what folly to sacrifice the blessings of eternity for these perishable goods of time! If I considered them from the point of view of death, how undeserving of esteem they would appear! Death, while ending my earthly life, will open the door of eternity. All my life should be a preparation for a good death.

3. *Death to the life of the senses.* To establish the reign of grace in our souls, we must

¹ GEN., 2¹⁷

die to the life of nature, that is, to those tendencies inclining us to evil. Hence the need of self-renunciation which our Lord proclaims as the first article of his law: *If any man will come after me, let him deny himself.*¹ All during the Lent the Church keeps this duty before our minds. The mortification of fasting and abstinence is one form of this renunciation. But the obligation of dying to ourselves extends to the interior life of the soul, to our thoughts and desires. It suppresses whatever God condemns. A rigorous law it is, but one we must follow if we wish to be true Christians; for without that self-renunciation, without that mortification of our body and its evil inclinations, we can not participate in the life of Christ.

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My Lord, impress upon my mind these divine truths which the Church teaches by the ceremony of Ash Wednesday. She begins Lent with a reminder of death. Grant that I may understand its deep significance and courageously conform to its practical consequences.

¹ MATT., 16²⁴

Many Christians will receive the ashes on their forehead today. But this ceremony will remind but few of them that they are sinners and as such condemned to die, and that they should die to themselves by practices of penance. Have I heretofore been among this unreflecting multitude? Have I not taken part in this ceremony without any supernatural motive and consequently without any spiritual profit?

Grant that I may profit by this grace and turn it to good account for my sanctification. May it truly mark the beginning of a holy season of penance and self-denial.

I resolve:

1. To have the thought of death frequently before me;

2. To begin Lent with a sincere determination to practice the mortifications imposed by the Church for my sins.

*Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.*¹

¹ GEN., 3¹⁹

XXVII

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST

SUMMARY

I. We will adore our Lord spending forty days in the desert to prepare for the assaults of the devil. We will contemplate the circumstances of his temptation.

II. We will consider three effects of Christ's victory over Satan.

1. *It reestablished God's usurped empire*; for, in his replies to Satan, he proclaims God as the creator of all things, alone deserving our adoration. And he justifies divine Providence in the government of the world.

2. *It glorified our Lord*, for it gave him sovereign dominion over all creation. He manifests his consecration to God, which, in fact, began at the first moment of his life.

3. *It freed us from the servitude of Satan*. The devil is not deprived of his power to tempt us. But he is no longer to be feared. The grace of Christ renders us superior to all his attacks.

III. We will rejoice that God's honor has been re-established. We will love our Lord for being our champion. We will increase our confidence in the grace of God.

We will resolve, by resisting temptation, to purify our soul, increase our merit, and glorify God and his divine Son.

God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able: but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it.

ADORATION

Let us adore our Lord spending forty days in the desert in prayer and fasting to prepare for the assaults of the tempter. *Then Jesus was led by the spirit into the desert, to be tempted by the devil.*¹

Our first parent in paradise was likewise subjected to temptation. But he yielded to the devil, thereby drawing down upon himself and all his posterity the most grievous misfortunes.

Christ was tempted in the desert. Satan, proud of his victory over the first Adam, presented himself before the Savior to tempt him. But this time he was overcome and Christ remained unshaken in his fidelity to God.

Two evangelists, St. Matthew and St. Luke, describe the circumstances minutely. Our

¹ MATT., 4¹

Lord had already been praying and fasting forty days when the devil offered his perfidious suggestions. But Christ was superior to all his seductions. *Then the devil left him; and behold angels came and ministered to him.*¹ St. Paul says: *Wherefore it behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren. . . . For in that, wherein he himself hath suffered and been tempted, he is able to succor them also that are tempted.*² Let us join the angels who ministered to him after the victory and acknowledge him as our Lord and Master.

CONSIDERATIONS

Adam, in yielding to the tempter, gave the devil a preeminence over God by dethroning the divine majesty and despising his commands; over himself by submitting to the empire of this angel of darkness; over his posterity by making them slaves of the devil through his sin. But the victory of Christ over Satan produced three contrary effects: it reestablished God's usurped empire in the souls of men; it won back the place of honor which man occupied before the fall; it freed

¹ MATT., 4¹¹ ² HEB., 2¹⁷

his spiritual posterity from the servitude of Satan.

1. *Christ's victory reestablished God's usurped empire.* In each of his replies to the tempter he proclaims the rights and prerogatives of God, to whom is due all honor and glory. In overcoming the first temptation he shows us that God is the creator of all things, the source of life and being, on whom all depend. The bread which nourishes us has not that power of itself. God has made it the instrument of his power that it might sustain our life. He might have accomplished the same purpose in other ways.

*Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God.*¹

Christ's second reply establishes God's inalienable right to man's adoration. *The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and him only shalt thou serve.*² Since the advent of sin this right had been lost sight of. The devil, under the names of false deities, was substituted for the true God. He became, in a way, *the prince of this world.*³ Christ protests against this sacrilegious usurpation, declaring that God

¹MATT., 4⁴

²MATT., 4¹⁰

³JOHN, 12³¹

is the supreme Master to whom all must submit, before whom every knee should bend. He alone has the right to be adored.

By his third reply: *Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.*¹ Our Lord justifies divine providence in the government of the world and shows in what manner and to what extent we should depend upon him. He marks the limit between the pious confidence of those who trust to God's protection and invoke it in all necessities and the presumption of pride which thinks it has a right to divine protection, murmurs against trials, and pretends to obtain from God what God has not promised.

2. *It glorified our Lord.* His holiness and power shine forth gloriously in this victory over the enemy of God and of man. By it he gained over all creation that sovereign sway which had been promised him.

Like the angels in heaven, like Adam in the earthly paradise, Christ had to undergo temptation. He must give himself to God and consecrate himself to his service by an act of his free will, establishing his claim to perfect holiness of which he was to be the preacher, source, and model for all mankind.

¹ MATT., 4⁷

In fact, from the first moment of his life, our Lord had repeated: *Dominus pars hereditatis meae*.¹ But this free consecration of his whole being to God was now to have its external manifestation.

Christ is about to begin his public ministry. The devil makes three attacks upon him, trying to seduce him by the different inclinations that lead men to evil and make them forget what they owe to God. But our Lord repulsed every assault and forced the tempter to depart.

3. *It freed us from the servitude of Satan.* The weakness of Adam in the presence of temptation was the cause of a deplorable loss for us; but our Savior's victory rescued us. Adam by yielding subjected us all to Satan; Christ by resisting freed us from our shameful slavery.

Satan's defeat, however, does not deprive him of his power to tempt us. That is what the gospel narrative insinuates when it says that the devil withdrew for a time. He will return to make war on Christ in the person of his friends and followers. The Holy Spirit teaches us that we are all called to com-

¹ Ps., 15⁶

bat this enemy of our salvation. *For our wrestling is against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places.*¹ And St. Peter says: *Our adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth forth seeking whom he may devour.*²

Since the victory of Christ, the devil need no longer be feared. The Church possesses an all-powerful grace to rescue us from his snares and to render us in Christ superior to all attacks of the tempter.

This grace is seen in the almost complete cessation of the strange power which the devil had over men's bodies before the preaching of the gospel.

It also appears in the spiritual order by the facility with which Christians, if they are faithful, repel the most violent temptations. Our Lord, the conqueror of Satan, sustains us in these dangerous moments. *The Lord is with me as a strong warrior: therefore they that persecute me shall fall and shall be weak.*³ The devil is powerless against a soul that confides in the grace of Christ.

¹ EPHES., 6¹²

² I PET., 5⁸

³ JER., 20¹¹

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

As a result of these reflections, our first feeling should be one of joy because God's power has been reestablished, his throne set up in the world, his altars substituted for those of Satan. We desire to see God more widely known, better loved, more faithfully served. *Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered: and let them that hate him flee before his face.*¹

We should have a great love for our divine champion. He has freed us from the dominion of Satan. Does he not deserve the devotion of our hearts and our faithful service?

Lastly, this mystery in the life of our Lord should give us confidence in his grace. *God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able: but will make also with temptation issue that you may be able to bear it.*² We must be subjected to temptation; it is the way that leads to God. But let us remember that the devil can have no more dominion over us than we freely yield to him. If we earnestly wish to belong to

¹ Ps., 67² ² I Cor., 10¹³

Christ, all the powers of hell can not separate us from him.

I resolve, by resisting temptation, to purify my soul, increase my merit, and glorify God and his divine Son.

God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able: but will make also with temptation issue that you may be able to bear it.¹

¹ I COR., 10¹³

XXVIII

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

THE TRANSFIGURATION

SUMMARY

- I. We will visit in spirit the mountain where Christ was transfigured. We will listen to the voice of the heavenly Father directing us to hear his Son. We will adore our Lord and ask him to make us participate in the mystery of his Transfiguration.
- II. We will consider the three transfigurations that we must undergo in the seminary.
1. *We must become men* by directing our lives according to the dictates of reason.
 2. *We must become Christians* by living the supernatural life, the source of which is Christ.
 3. *We must become priests* by the practice of devotion to God and his honor, zeal for the salvation of souls, and the spirit of sacrifice.
- III. We will ask ourselves whether we are cultivating the seriousness of manhood, the supernatural life of a Christian, and the sacerdotal virtues of the priesthood.

We will resolve to ask ourselves often: Is this act worthy of a man? Is it worthy of a Christian? Is it worthy of a priest?

Sacerdos alter Christus.

ADORATION

Today the Church proposes for our consideration the mystery of our Lord's Transfiguration on Mt. Thabor. It is a glimpse of heavenly glory in the midst of the grave and serious thoughts of Lent to help us more courageously to bear the rigors of penance. Moreover the Church places this mystery before us as a model of the transformations which the exercises of Lent should bring about in us. Is it not a type of the souls in which grace has triumphed over nature?

At the beginning of our meditation let us in spirit visit the mountain where Christ brings three of his disciples, Peter, James, and John, to make them witnesses of his glory. In the light of faith let us contemplate the thrilling sight which it was their privilege to behold. Prostrate at our Savior's feet in company with these disciples, bathed in the dazzling light that emanated from his adorable person, let us harken to the voice of the heavenly Father proclaiming his Son and directing us to hear his word. Let us acknowledge Christ as our Savior and divine Master and ask him to grant us a participation in the mystery of his Transfiguration.

CONSIDERATIONS

Let us consider that during our seminary life the mystery of the Transfiguration should be reproduced in us in three ways.

1. *We must become men.* Heretofore we were children in years, in character, in our tastes and all our habits. *When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child.*¹

But it can no longer be so. We have reached the age of manhood, of reflection, when serious thoughts replace those of childhood. The time has come for us to choose a state of life that will place us in the society of men. The seminary is a house where all is grave and recollected, where a constant appeal is made to our conscience; where consequently we are considered capable of directing ourselves. The nature of the rule which we observe, the exercises that we perform, the studies to which we devote ourselves, the exhortations we hear, all suppose that we are not children, but men.

Hence we should put aside everything puerile. *When I became a man, I put away*

¹ I COR., 13¹¹

*the things of a child.*¹ A child is light-minded; he yields to every new attraction and impulse; feeling and imagination are his chief motives, he experiences a continual need of noise, movement, and amusement; any kind of rule is a burden to him; silence is unbearable. But I must become serious-minded; I must learn how to restrain the spontaneous impulses of my nature; my reason must develop and rule my life.

A child does not reflect. He neither weighs the motives of his acts nor calculates their consequences. He does not profit by the past, nor is he attentive to the present; and he has no foresight for the future, which he leaves to the care of others. Any continued application or serious work wearies him. But I must cultivate habits of reflection, profit by experience; learn how to direct my thoughts and acts, my whole life towards a useful end, to judge wisely, to act prudently.

A child is fickle. With caprice as his law, he quickly passes from one extreme to another. His resolutions are forgotten almost as soon as they are formed. He is incapable of strong determination. In becoming a man

¹ I COR., 13¹¹

I must pass from this life of childish caprice to one of manly determination, ruled by reason.

2. *We must become true Christians.* This second transformation must be brought about by God's grace. It is above the life of reason. This supernatural life of grace by which we become Christians springs from Christ. *I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly,*¹ says our Lord.

This imposes two obligations on us. The first is to desire that this supernatural life which we already possess should be still more abundantly communicated to us; to ask God constantly for it; to profit by the means placed at our disposal for perfecting our interior life. These means are offered to us in extraordinary abundance: prayer in its various forms; assistance at the daily sacrifice of the mass; the Holy Eucharist, in which we receive the source of Christian life. What a misfortune if we fail to take advantage of these opportunities granted us by our Lord!

Our second duty is to follow the laws of the supernatural life. They are summed up by saying that we should do everything through

¹ JOHN, 10¹⁰

Christ, with Christ, and in Christ. That is to say, through his influence and under the impulse of his grace, imitating his life, and in union with him.

3. *We must become priests.* To make us worthy of this eminent dignity is the object of our whole seminary life, of its every detail. To become worthy priests, the indelible character received in Holy Orders will not suffice; we must possess the spirit of Christ, our great High Priest.

This spirit consists in a profound devotion to God and his honor, and ardent zeal for the salvation of souls redeemed by the blood of Christ, and a readiness to sacrifice ourselves, in imitation of Christ, for the attainment of that twofold purpose.

Christianus propter te, says a spiritual writer, *sacerdos propter alios*. The ordinary Christian works for his own salvation, seeks to destroy his evil inclinations, and to progress in the practice of virtue. The priest can not neglect these aims, for before all he must be a Christian, a perfect Christian. But he is *sacerdos propter alios*. It is his duty to consume his whole life in a zealous devotion to the salvation of his brethren.

Devotion to God, love of souls, and a life of sacrifice are the incessant teaching of the seminary. We will neglect to cultivate these aims only under the pain of being unfaithful to our vocation, of not corresponding with God's plans in our regard, of becoming unfruitful priests in the Church of God.

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

After an honest self-examination, do we find that we have that gravity, seriousness, reflection, and constancy which distinguish men from children?

Do we lead the life of Christ, are we united to him? Do we try to reproduce his virtues in ourselves?

Finally, as we advance in the seminary, does our character conform more and more to the ideal of the priesthood? Have we God's honor deeply, very deeply at heart? Have we a desire to see him known, loved, and obeyed? Does our love for souls make us grieve that so many are being lost every day? And do we rejoice at the thought that we are to consecrate our lives to the work of

redeeming these souls from perdition and leading them to heaven?

Let us resolve to ask ourselves often: Is this act worthy of a man? Is it worthy of a Christian? Is it worthy of a priest?

Sacerdos alter Christus.

XXIX

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

RELAPSE

SUMMARY

I. We will adore our Lord in his constant fidelity to God and God's law. It governed his every act. There are many saints who did not always belong to God. But once converted, they constantly progressed in perfection.

II. We will consider:

1. *What is meant by relapse.* It is the unhappy state of a soul which after being reconciled to God, walks again in its former ways of sin. Besides relapse into mortal sin, there is relapse into lukewarmness. This is what we have particularly to fear.

2. *The evil of relapse.* There is a positive resistance to grace. This lack of constancy and firmness gives a disquieting prognosis for the future.

3. *The means that will fortify us against relapse:* often to ask God to keep us in his fervor and love; to meditate on the truths that led us to abandon our lukewarmness; daily examination of conscience; and constant vigilance against the first symptoms of relaxation.

III. We will acknowledge our inconstancy and confess that we can do nothing without the help of God's grace.

We will resolve to employ every means to avoid relapse into lukewarmness in God's service.

The last state of that man is made worse than the first.

ADORATION

Let us adore our Lord in his constant fidelity to God and God's law. At the very beginning of his life, his first act was one of obedience and submission to the divine law. *Thy law in the midst of my heart.*¹ It governed his every act and was the end of all his mysteries. In his life there was nothing like the deplorable fluctuations between fidelity and unfaithfulness which we find in our lives.

Let us honor the same unshaken faithfulness to God and his service in Mary, in the apostles and martyrs, in all the saints.

Many of them did not have the happiness of belonging to God from the beginning of their life. They had strayed from the path of righteousness into ways of sin. But once converted by the victory of divine grace, they did not again return to their former life but constantly

¹ Ps., 39⁹

progressed in perfection. This was notably true of St. Paul, St. Augustine, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Francis Xavier, St. Ignatius, and a host of others.

Let us ask our Lord to grant us, by the intercession of these saints, a participation in the same grace, that we may profit from the lesson of today's gospel and entertain a salutary dread of relapse into sin.

CONSIDERATIONS

Let us consider what is meant by relapse, its evil, and the means that will fortify us against it.

1. *What is meant by relapse.* In a strict sense it means every grave fault committed after absolution. A sincerely converted and repentant soul, in a moment of forgetfulness and weakness, under the influence of a violent temptation and in the presence of a delicate occasion, has the misfortune of committing a grievous sin in which there is more surprise and carelessness than malice. But, humbled by his own weakness, he confesses his sin and renews his good resolutions with greater fervor. Evidently this is not the relapse of which our Lord speaks in the gospel. It is rather the

unhappy state of a soul which, after being reconciled to God, walks again in its former ways of sin.

There are two degrees of relapse. The first is a return to mortal sin. Thanks be to God, it is not this relapse we have to fear in the seminary. But there is another which threatens us, against which we must fortify ourselves: a relapse from the state of fervor to which God's grace has led us into the state of negligence and lukewarmness.

For some time the community has seen one of its members giving his confrères the sad spectacle of lukewarmness. Piety, study, regularity, all have been neglected. God's grace speaks to his soul, he repents. The sincere fervor of his fellow-seminarians has been a constant reproach to him. He has been exhorted and reprimanded. At length all these accusing voices are heard. A retreat, a holy day, perhaps a humiliation or some well merited lesson is the occasion by which Providence brings about his return. Edifying conduct replaces his former bad example. But the joy of his superiors and his fellow-students is of short duration. Little by little nature and his former habits reassert

themselves and soon his negligence reappears. The demon of idleness, dissipation, and lukewarmness in God's service visits him, is admitted, and takes possession. This is the relapse we have to fear.

2. *The evil of relapse.* *The last state of that man, says our Lord, is made worse than the first.*¹ In the first place there is a positive resistance to the grace of God. After tasting the gift of God, he abandons it to follow the instincts of his evil nature. Our Lord has been merciful to him, making him understand the evil of his former life. And he has experienced the joy that one finds in God's service. His return to lukewarmness is without excuse, without extenuating circumstance. The prodigal son was blameworthy. But how could we describe his guilt if, after his pardon and the merciful reception given him on his return, he had gone back to his former way and again saddened his father's heart?

Moreover relapse exposes us to terrible punishment. It supposes a grave abuse of grace and consequently deserves that God should withdraw this precious gift. In fact he does,

¹ MATT., 12⁴⁵

at least partly. A second conversion is more difficult and often does not take place.

What gives to such a relapse a disquieting prognosis for the future is that it indicates a lack of constancy and firmness. This would be a sad defect in the character of a priest. How will a seminarian, who can scarcely persevere in his good resolutions for a few weeks, later on persevere in a truly priestly life? According to all indications, he will be in the priesthood what he has been in the seminary. God grant he be not even worse!

3. *The means that will fortify us against relapse.* The first is often to ask God to keep us in the fervor of his love. It was his grace that converted us, and only his grace can make our conversion endure. *Confirm, O God, what thou hast wrought in us.*¹

A second means is to meditate seriously from time to time on the truths that led us to abandon our lukewarmness and to serve God fervently. We need a profound conviction of the motives that urge us to serve God. Unless we recall them to mind, they gradually become weakened and finally disappear.

A third means is a serious examination of

¹ Ps., 67²⁹

conscience every day to see how we stand with God. Generally the relaxation that brings about lukewarmness is effected gradually. Only a vigilant self-examination will reveal such a tendency to us.

It follows that we should fight against these first symptoms as soon as we perceive them. Thanks to such watchfulness, evil tendencies, destroyed in the germ, can not take root. If we allow them to develop, they will not be exterminated so easily.

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS

My God, when I look over my past years which should have been a steady progress in holiness and perfection, I see them marked by alternating conversion and relapses, good resolutions quickly followed by neglect. *I said: I shall never be moved.*¹ A few days pass and all is forgotten.

Thou, my Savior, knowest my weakness, my inconstancy. Grant me the help of thy strength. Make me constant in devotion to thee. Grant that I may not be numbered among those who, having put their hand to the plow,

¹ Ps., 29⁷

look back and thus become unworthy of admission into thy kingdom.

I resolve to employ every means to avoid relapse into lukewarmness in God's service.

*The last state of that man is made worse than the first.*¹



¹ MATT., 12⁴⁵

XXX

FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT

THE MULTIPLICATION OF THE LOAVES

SUMMARY

I. We will adore our Lord inviting us to rejoice in the midst of Lent. A ray of joy moderates the rigor of the penitential season.

II. We will consider three reasons for this spiritual joy in the midst of Lent.

1. Like the crowd following our Lord, we have become more attached to him during Lent. We have made some efforts in the practice of penance. The grace of Lent has not been in vain.

2. The Savior continues this miracle in a spiritual manner, multiplying the graces he bestows on us as a reward for our practice of penance. We will rejoice that our souls have been more purified, our passions more subdued, and our dissipation of heart and mind more restrained.

3. Our Lord promised another, a spiritual bread to his followers. During the last weeks of Lent the treasures of grace are still more abundant. We are about to contemplate the most sublime mysteries in the life of our Savior.

III. We will regret our lack of coöperation with God's grace and resolve to show our gratitude to him by greater fidelity in all our duties.

Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that we who for our deeds are justly punished, by the comfort of thy grace may mercifully be relieved.

ADORATION

Let us adore our Lord presenting to his followers both the chalice of penance and that of joy. At the beginning of Lent holy Church invited us to follow him into the desert, there to join him in fasting and penance. Today she calls upon us to rejoice.

This does not mean that the practice of penance should cease. It is still the season of Lent; but a ray of joy moderates its rigor with divine consolation. This contrast is most striking today. The sacred ministers at the altar have put aside the penitential color; the altar is adorned with flowers; and the words of the liturgy echo the same note of joy. *Rejoice, O Jerusalem, and come together all ye that love her; rejoice with joy, ye that have been in sorrow: that ye may exult, and be filled from the breasts of your consolations.*¹

Let us thank our Lord for inspiring the Church to renew our courage in the middle of Lent by this joyful feast. *Grant, we beseech*

¹ INTR. 4TH SUN. OF LENT

*thee, Almighty God, that we who for our deeds are justly punished, by the comfort of thy grace may mercifully be relieved.*¹

CONSIDERATIONS

Let us consider, in the light of today's gospel, three reasons for this spiritual joy in the midst of Lent.

1. *Jesus went over the sea of Galilee and a great multitude followed him.*² In their eagerness to hear him, they even forgot their need of food. Are not these Israelites following Christ an image of the Christian following the Lord into the desert by the lenten practice of mortification and a more intense devotion to exercises of piety? From the beginning of Lent there has been in the Church an inspiration of faith and devotion leading us to become more faithfully attached to our Lord and to serve him better. *Behold now is the acceptable time, behold now is the day of salvation,*³ says the apostle.

During this first part of Lent we have made some efforts; we have given God new proofs of our good will. We have followed the regu-

¹ PRAYER, 4TH SUN. OF LENT

² JOHN, 6¹ ³ II COR., 6²

lations of the Church, glad to offer some little penance for our sins. Especially we have tried to practice the holiest of all penances in the conscientious discharge of our daily duties; greater regularity and fervor in our devotions, more assiduous application to every duty, fidelity to the inspirations of grace, more frequent practices of virtue, a determined struggle to overcome our dominant fault.

It would be unfortunate indeed if we had reached the middle of Lent without having accomplished any notable improvement or at least made generous efforts. We have all been doing something for God, and the grace of Lent has not been in vain.

2. The crowd that so courageously followed our Lord received a precious reward. In the multiplication of the loaves they witnessed one of our Lord's greatest miracles, performed for their sake.

The Savior continues this miracle in a spiritual manner for his faithful followers. We see in the multiplication of the loaves a symbol of the treasures of grace by which he rewards whatever we do for him.

We have shown our good will by sincere efforts which, made productive by his grace, will not lack a fruitful harvest.

We know three obstacles to the reign of God within us, preventing us from enjoying the blessing of his divine presence: they are the stain of sin, the unmortified passions of our fallen nature, and the dissipation of mind and heart through the life of the senses. But the practices of Lent have diminished these obstacles.

As a reward for our penance God has pardoned our offenses, purified our hearts, and given us his grace and friendship. We have called upon him in the words of the prophet. *Have mercy on us, O God, according to thy great mercies.*¹ That cry of our heart has reached his throne of mercy and brought down his grace and pardon. Our soul is freed from sin, enriched by the gifts of God, and more confirmed in divine charity than it was at the beginning of Lent.

If we have earnestly striven against our passions, our innermost enemies, they must have lost at least part of their violence, we must have become their master. Our temptations are less severe and less frequent. It is easier for us to observe silence and to control our temper. Consequently we have more

¹ Ps., 50¹

of that habitual recollection so needful for our life of prayer and study.

3. After the multiplication of the loaves, Christ wished to impress those who followed him with a desire for another bread which he would multiply in the Church in a manner still more miraculous. *The bread that I will give, is my flesh for the life of the world.*¹

The last weeks of Lent constitute the holiest time of the whole year. Our Lord's treasures of grace are opened and flood our souls with their abundant riches.

The standard of the cross is displayed before our eyes. Christ goes before us carrying the cross. He invites us to follow him, not only into the desert or to Mt. Thabor, but to the last supper, to the Garden of Olives, the pretorium, to Calvary and there to contemplate and adore the most impressive mysteries of religion. After that he will appear to us glorious and immortal, confirming the faith of his disciples by the great miracle of the resurrection. Moreover, we will participate in these mysteries, we will be associated in the life of Christ.

¹ JOHN, 6⁵²

ACTS AND RESOLUTIONS .

Today we are invited to rejoice. But not all will share this joy in the same degree because all have not equally coöperated with the grace of Lent. The consolation and peace of God penetrates our souls in proportion to the fervor of our dispositions. The purer our soul, the more detached from the love of creatures, the more enkindled by divine charity, so much the more will interior joy abound. *If there be joy in the world, says the author of the Imitation, truly the man of pure heart possesseth it.*¹

My God, if I have not the joy which thy devoted friends experience, is it not because I do not serve thee with all the fervor thou dost ask? Is it not because my heart does not seek its all in thee?

I resolve to show my gratitude to God by greater fidelity to him in all my duties.

*Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that we who for our deeds are justly punished, by the comfort of thy grace may mercifully be relieved.*²

¹ IMIT. II, 4²² PRAYER, 4TH SUN. OF LENT



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